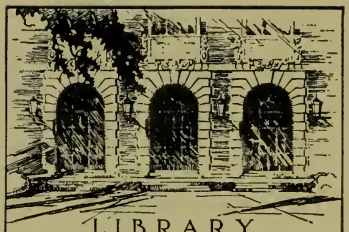

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MILDRED VERNON;

A TALE OF PARISIAN LIFE

IN THE

LAST DAYS OF THE MONARCHY.

BY

HAMILTON MURRAY.

"You're not a moral people, and you know it,
Without the aid of too sincere a poet."

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MILDRED VERNON.

CHAPTER I.

At the end of a few hours, Sir Edward was conveyed to his own room, and quietly placed in his bed. Mildred and Madame de Boislambert watched by his side. One of the first requests Lady Vernon had addressed to Gaston was, that he would ride as fast as possible to Montmorency, and obtain every detail respecting M. de Moreton's state, and discover what measures had been taken respecting the Viscountess.

The Duke would not take his leave without, on his part, soliciting a favour from Madame de Boislambert. As he was preparing to depart, he approached her, and bowing respectfully:

"Madame la Marquise," said he, "may I not be allowed to acquaint my mother—" An involuntary movement of alarm on her part interrupted him. "She would have been so *really* happy to see you," continued he; "and I would almost have ventured to suggest that the date of her friendship gave her a *right*—a right above that of others—" and he glanced at Mildred.

Madame de Boislambert blushed deeply, for she thought she discovered an intention on M. de Montévreux's part, in the justice of which she could not but coincide. She felt that Mildred, having behaved so generously, must not be left alone in her generosity, and that it was not fair to deprive her actions of the countenance and support of such a person as the Duchess.

"It shall be as Madame de Montévreux pleases," replied she, without raising her eyes; "but from *all* others, let me be shielded."

"And my cousin, Clémentine?" asked he, imploringly; "have you the heart to deprive

her, in her present situation, of that which, perhaps alone, would be capable of consoling her?"

"Poor, poor Clémentine!" exclaimed the Marquise. "If Heaven, in its mercy, avert from her the blow we fear, her joy will be such, that all addition to it will be impossible; and if, on the contrary, the worst should happen, nothing on this side the grave can bring her consolation."

With these words, M. de Montévreux took his leave, feeling himself at liberty to apprize both his mother and the Viscountess of the presence in Lady Vernon's house of their so deeply-mourned friend. As the discovery of Madame de Boislambert had luckily occurred when no one else was by, the secret was easily kept; and for Dr. Bertrand, and all others who approached her, she still remained, as heretofore, Madame Fournier.

Towards the close of the day, Mildred found herself alone in her husband's room. The

Doctor had left the château, promising to return late at night. The Marchioness, infinitely more accustomed than her friend to take active care of the sick and suffering, superintended the preparation of every medicament, poultice, lotion, or *tisane*, that M. Bertrand had prescribed for the patient; and on these occasions, Lady Vernon kept a solitary watch by the bed of the wounded man. As the evenings at this season were already chilly, and Sir Edward had complained of intense cold in his limbs, a small fire had been kindled on the hearth; and while it sent forth its flickering, lurid reflection on the floor, a last golden ray of the slowly-setting sun, passing through an opening in the window-curtain, was expiring in its face on the brazen dogs of the *foyer*.

At that melancholy hour of waning daylight, and in the peculiarly silent stillness that reigns in a sick-room, Mildred felt her ideas take an unusually serious turn. She thought over all the events of her past life; her youth, and the

first deceptive ray of gladness that had cheered it, when Sir Edward Vernon had confessed his love.

She wandered on, then, to the early days of her married life, and sighed to recollect how short a time her wedded happiness had lasted. For the first time in her life, she sought to examine herself conscientiously, and, comparing her conduct with that of Madame de Moreton, asked herself whether in truth she had acted rightly; whether a little indulgence on her part was not called for? and whether, had she shewn somewhat less disdain, and somewhat more tenderness, she would not have better discharged her duties as a wife?

Lady Vernon sat for some time lost in contemplations of the past, and as she mused, her feelings softened imperceptibly towards her husband. The irregular, oppressed breathing which every now and then struck her ear, reminded her of his state of helpless suffering. She contrasted this with visions of the first days in which they met, when she, ignorant,

solitary country girl as she was, looked upon the brilliant Sir Edward Vernon as a type of another order of creation.

An uneasy movement of the sleeper brought Mildred to his bedside, and, with a tenderer sympathy than she had yet evinced, she leaned down over Sir Edward, and her breath touched his cheek. He was sleeping, but unquietly. Lady Vernon's heart melted within her to see him laid so low—so powerless—so entirely at the mercy of those around him! Passing her hand lightly over his forehead, she carefully put aside the straggling locks that overhung it. Sir Edward's hair was remarkably beautiful; and as Mildred touched the fine silken curls, she could not avoid thinking she had once been very proud of them. She bent over him, and her lips had nearly touched his brow, when another movement on his part arrested her. His lips moved. She listened eagerly to catch the words: "Aurélie!" murmured he, in broken accents, half unclosing his eyes, "*Est-ce toi?*"

Mildred started back, and, hastily letting the curtain fall, returned to her place by the fireside. The room was too dark for the wounded man, even had he been conscious of what passed, to perceive whose had been the form that leant over him. He thought he had been dreaming, and, closing his eyes again, he sunk once more into the sort of lethargy whence he had not force enough to extricate his senses.

That one name, "*Aurélie*," and those three little words, "*est-ce-toi?*" had for ever driven from Mildred's heart, and scattered to the winds, all returning kindliness of feeling towards Sir Edward. With lips firmly compressed, and a countenance expressive more of haughty contempt than of any other sentiment, Lady Vernon stood leaning against the chimney-piece, and apparently intent on watching the caprices of the flame beneath.

As Madame de Boislambert's absence was prolonged, Mildred turned to an *étagère*, and sought out a book, wherewith, by the light of the fire, to beguile the time. At the very

top of the shelves, Mildred descried a volume which she thought she recognised. It was an English annual, a copy of the *Keepsake*, given to Mildred Egerton by Lady Augusta Danvers, during her visit to the Larches. That was the book that rested upon Mildred's knee the day that Sir Edward Vernon surprised her in her favourite haunt, and asked her if she would consent to change her name for his! He had begged it of her when they married, and she had never seen it since.

While Mildred was employed in turning over page after page, something flew out from between them, and dropped in the folds of her dress. She picked it up—it was a dry leaf—a leaf from the plane-tree under which she had sat when Sir Edward told the tale of his love! Lady Vernon held in her hand this withered symbol of affection not less dead, and gazed at it with something like regret. Stooping forward to the burning embers, she stretched forth her hand—seemed to reflect, almost to hesitate—and then dropped the shrivelled leaf into the flame.

In the little crackling sound which told the fire had done its work, disappeared the last trace of what Mildred once thought would be her romance of life.

It was late in the evening before Gaston returned from Montmorency; and the news he brought were far from consolatory. M. de Moreton had been carried to the *Cheval Blanc*, and there he lay under the care of the surgeon. The Viscountess had been apprised by this gentleman of what had occurred, and she had instantly flown to her husband's side. M. de Montévreux was luckily present at her arrival, for without him, she would have been entirely surrounded by strangers, and, in his description to Lady Vernon and to Madame de Boislambert of what had then taken place, he was enthusiastic in his admiration of the devotion of the Viscountess to her husband, and complete forgetfulness of his conduct towards her.

Mildred could not help feeling uncomfortable at being obliged to acknowledge that she was far from occupying the same exalted level with

her friend, the Viscountess. She consoled herself, however, as most people do, by cheating her conscience, and trying to be persuaded that Madame de Moreton's wrongs were infinitely less than hers—as if that made any difference—or as if, in such cases, when people are blind, a mountain, more than a mole-hill, could pierce through the sublime obtuseness of their vision. Here lay a constant and capital mistake of Lady Vernon's, to measure the resentment upon the extent of the offence; whereas, where women are in question, and where they are determined to overlook transgressions, they sweep away every vestige of sin, great and small, in one flood of pardon; and in their generous oblivion of injuries, merit the words of the Psalmist: "*Si iniquitates observaveris, quis sustinebit?*"

While Madame de Boislambert was present, Gaston addressed himself less to Lady Vernon than to the Marquise; and when he did speak to Mildred, it was without raising his eyes to her face. Since the morning, something had

occurred which changed his position relatively to Lady Vernon. She, whom, notwithstanding her position as a married woman, he dared to approach with feelings of ardent affection, had, that day, sacrificed to him a conviction, a prejudice. She was nearer to him, by a concession, than she had been the day before, and, while he loved her still more deeply, both for the generous act itself, and for the manner of doing it, he felt a kind of nervous timidity, hitherto unknown, at the idea of finding himself alone with her. Lady Vernon, like most of her innocent countrywomen in similar circumstances, was destined to augment this feeling considerably; and had not an accident prevented it, M. de Montévreux must have been irresistibly hurried into a premature avowal of sentiments he had not yet ostensibly declared to their object.

Mildred was seated on one side of the fireplace; Madame de Boislambert's empty *fauteuil* was opposite to her. Gaston occupied the

chair between the two. The Marchioness had been absent nearly half an hour. Not a sound stirred in doors or without. Sir Edward slept, to all appearance, calmly. A night-lamp burnt on a table behind Mildred, shedding its faint light no further than its own small circle of radiance. The fire was waning gradually on the hearth, and yet neither Gaston nor Lady Vernon stirred to revive its decaying embers.

They had ceased speaking as Madame de Boislambert quitted the room, and since her departure had not uttered a syllable. At last, Mildred bent forward slightly on her chair, and, as though she felt she ought to speak, and could do nothing more polite or fitting than allude to the events of the day:—

"Are you satisfied?" said she, with downcast eyes, and in a tone that should have been steadier. "Did my behaviour to Madame de Boislambert—"

Before M. de Montévreux was able to answer in words,—a prey to surprise and instinctive delight—he had imprinted his sole reply on her

hand, in a kiss. While raising Lady Vernon's hand to his lips, Gaston cast towards her a timid glance. Through her downcast eyelids, Mildred *felt*, though she could not *see*, the imploring ardour of that look, and beneath its searching fire, cheek and brow became suffused with one blushing, burning glow of crimson. Gaston still held in his, Lady Vernon's unresisting hand, when Madame de Boislambert entered.

The Duke dropped Mildred's hand with lightning-like rapidity, and Mildred as suddenly withdrew it. Alas! are then the words of the Florentine so true?

"Amor a nullo amato amar perdona."

And are you, Lady Vernon, becoming conscious of it?

CHAPTER II.

It appeared that the Viscount had somewhat hurried his return to Paris, from the circumstance of having received but one letter from Aurélie since his departure for the Levant. Rendered already uneasy by this, and determined to know the worst, M. de Moreton had deemed unnecessary to apprize the Baroness of the precise period of his return. Before he had been thirty-six hours in Paris, and before any one, but the minister, his own family, and one or two trusty friends, knew of his arrival there, Armand had surprised Madame de Cévèzes at her villa, near Enghien.

"Surprised" is, perhaps, not exactly the word,

for Aurélie's effrontery was such that it was scarcely possible to take her at fault. She received Moreton as though his visit were the most natural thing in the world, and asked him to stay and dine precisely as though he had done nothing else every day during the last three months. But his cool collectedness was as remarkable as her own, and he arrived from his distant journey—full of suspicious fears and sinister thoughts, just as he would have done from the Bois de Boulogne, or from a *course* in the *Champs de Mars*.

Now, however cool a woman may be, the collectedness of a man always beats hers, and therefore, the Viscount's impassible demeanour had finished, before dinner was well over, by irritating Aurélie; but as, on the other hand, the viciousness of a woman, when she *is* vicious, far surpasses any thing to which the worst of the other sex can lay claim, the Baroness, although certain that M. de Moreton's visit boded no good to those around him, and would probably lead to some fatal result, was

totally free, during the whole time, from either anxiety or alarm.

Her curiosity was excited, and she was annoyed at being in a manner trifled with, but nothing further; and when she saw the Viscount and Sir Edward leave the house together, (although it had been previously agreed that the latter was to be her guest for some days,) she bade adieu to them both with as careless a smile,—she said to both *à revoir* with an air as *enjoué* as if there existed no possible chance of her having seen both for the last time.

Between people "who know how to set about it," as it is commonly termed, nothing is more easily or more quietly arranged than a duel; and accordingly, before the Viscount had been for three-quarters of an hour under the same roof with his rival, he had found no difficulty in settling with him that they were to attempt each other's lives on the ensuing day.

Pistols were to be the arms, twelve paces the

distance. Moreton's first shot took effect; Sir Edward missed his aim; but, at the second fire, as Armand's hand had touched the trigger, he fell, to all appearance mortally wounded by his adversary's ball. His pistol had hung fire, or, probably—exposed again to the Viscount's usually unerring aim—Sir Edward would never have arisen from the ground where, after his second shot, he had sunk exhausted from loss of blood.

The duel made comparatively but little noise. The four seconds took a tour to Brussels; and the authorities seemed to care little enough for drawing publicity to an affair in which a principal actor had so recently been employed by Government on a responsible mission. In the meanwhile, the victims of the rencontre continued, under the care of their respective doctors, to be the cause of alarm and unhappiness to those around them.

Of the two wives, Madame de Moreton, although by far the most alarmed, was unquestionably the least to be pitied. Her love for

her husband, and her enthusiastic devotion to him, sustained her through trials that must otherwise have destroyed her. Lady Vernon, on the contrary, was left to find her sole support in a frigid sentiment of duty, which alone prevented her from feeling wholly indifferent to whatever in the end might ensue. Her husband's position, too, became a motive for daily and bitter humiliations inflicted on her by Madame de Cévèzes.

Aurélie, who never once took the trouble to enquire whether the Viscount were alive or dead, thought proper to come every day in a carriage, or on horseback, to the *grande entrée* of the château; and, ringing loudly at the bell, to desire her groom or footman to transmit a message in *her* name to Lady Vernon, demanding news of Sir Edward's health. This was, it is true, but a slight evil, compared with the possibility of the loss of human life, but it sufficed to keep up in Mildred's breast a constant feeling of irritation against her husband.

Nothing could be more affectionate, more touching than the reception given by Madame de Montévreux to the Marchioness. Folding her in a close embrace, the Duchess wept over her as would a mother over her child, giving her the most endearing names.

Madame de Boislambert was, after this, almost as much divided as the Duchess between the two sufferers ; but, for some private reason that she disclosed to none, more even of her time was given to Lady Vernon than to the Viscountess. She seemed resolved to watch over Mildred, and the latter had, no doubt, some instinctive feeling of the sort, for she clung to her more and more each day. The Marchioness saw the danger that threatened Lady Vernon much clearer than did Lady Vernon herself, and she afforded no opportunity to M. de Montévreux for being an instant alone with the object of his affection. Mildred, on the other hand, avoided the sight of Gaston unless in the presence of others, and even then but rarely spoke to him.

One morning, the Marchioness and Lady Vernon were alone in a little *salon* adjoining Sir Edward's apartment, used by him as a smoking-room, and whither Mildred and her friends were wont sometimes to retire when the patient did not require their care. Sir Edward was sleeping, and, through the half-opened door, his slightest movement would have been audible to his watchful nurses.

Mildred had nourished a secret desire to know the details of Madame de Boislambert's history, since the day when, in compliance with Gaston's wishes, and, to say the truth, with her own better feelings, she had held out her arms to her, and allowed her to retain in her heart the place that, as Madame Fournier, she had gained.

After listening to some self-condemnatory remarks from her friend,

"I am sure," said Lady Vernon, perhaps a little jesuitically, in order to hide the indiscreet degree to which her curiosity was carried, "that I should find in your history the extenuation of your fault."

Madame de Boislambert took Mildred's hand, and, looking in her face—

"It may be so," said she gravely; "but, above all, you will, I trust, find a lesson."

Lady Vernon was rather disposed to wonder what these last words could mean, when the Marchioness commenced.

"To make you understand, more clearly, the bearing of certain circumstances upon my actions, I must, I fear, begin at a remote period of my life; but I will waste as few words as possible upon whatever does not relate, indirectly at least, to the main point of my tale.

"My mother was a Spaniard, an Almodovar, of Granada, whose Moorish origin is sufficiently told by her name. My father met her in Paris, whither hers had been sent upon an important diplomatic mission. I was their only child. My mother, whose constant companion I was,

and who excited in me the most enthusiastic admiration, possessed to an excessive degree all the qualities and faults of her nation. Her pride of birth would have been offensive, had it not been counteracted by the rigid piety of a positive saint. Her devotion to her husband was that of a slave to a master, and, though she had strong maternal instincts, her affection for me was nothing in comparison with her blind adoration of my father. Her truth and uprightness of character would have been remarkable even in a man; and as her personal courage and capacity for supporting pain were heroic, one felt that nothing could be powerful enough to induce her to be guilty of any one of the conventional falsehoods towards which the world is so lenient. She would have died rather than break her word—and in saying this, I use no figure of speech, but mean literally that she would a thousand times over have preferred surrendering

life in the midst of the severest tortures to failing (as far as depended on herself) in any assurance she might once have given. She brought me up in these sentiments, and taught me to believe that the one sin for which there could be no forgiveness, the sin that merited in this world dishonour, and eternal torments in the next, was the rupture of a promise freely made. A promise—would she say—was so sacred a thing, that he to whom it was given, and who had relied on it, finding himself deceived in its accomplishment, had a right to consider, and to treat, the word-breaker as a liar, a thief and a felon. On this point she was inflexible; and she succeeded in instilling nearly the same ideas into my mind.

"As far back as I remember of my youth, our year was invariably spent in the same manner. From the beginning of November to the beginning of June, we lived in Paris; and from

June to the end of October, we inhabited Beaumeillant, my father's hereditary domain. The earliest friend I can remember, and the person whom next to my parents I oftenest saw, was the Abbé de Nangis. During our residence in Paris, he rarely failed to come once in every two days to our house. I cannot tell you with what a mixture of affection and reverence he inspired me—what a holy love I felt for him, even in the days of my childhood. My mother's devotion was so ascetic, and her character, inclining towards severity, if not towards harshness, impressed me with so much awe, that, although I entertained for her sentiments of enthusiastic admiration, I should far less have dared to confess a fault to her than M. de Nangis.

"From the age of ten to that of thirteen, I was sent to the Convent of the *Dames de la Visitation*, at St. Malo; where, under the

guidance of my father's sister, the *Supérieure*, I passed, in habits of study and religious practices, three years, that were far from being the three least happy of my life. As Beaumeillant was situated at only four leagues' distance from St. Malo, on the road to Dinan, my mother visited me whenever the Superior chose, and once she came accompanied by the Abbé de Nangis, who was spending some weeks amongst different relatives and friends in Brittany. The year following my leaving the convent, I received my first communion from his hands, and from that hour he had no more zealous penitent.

"I had not quite attained the age of sixteen, when an event occurred which exercised a fatal influence over the remainder of my existence.

"The first days of June had, as usual, found us in our peaceful solitude of Beaumeillant. It was in the year 1833. The whole neighbourhood was ringing with what the lower orders denominated the wild prodigality of a new inhabitant. Effectively, at the extremity

of our woods, was springing up, under the efforts of workmen, brought, some from Rennes, and some even from Paris, a very spacious, handsome, modern country-house. The old mansion, which—with its grounds and park, the property of a ruined noble family—had been sold to a rich bourgeois, was razed to the ground, and on the spot where it stood was springing up the edifice I have named. One day, my father returned from his habitual morning excursion, accompanied by an elderly man, whom I had never seen. Turning to my mother:

"'Dolorès,' said he, 'let me present to you our new neighbour, in whom I have discovered an old acquaintance. Madame la Comtesse—M. Chavigny.'

"My father's manner, though frank and cordial, was that of a grand seigneur to an inferior whom he wishes to put at his ease. My mother's, on the contrary, was tinged with a haughty reserve, that I could not but think unfeeling. I was as well aware as she could

be, that, socially speaking, M. Chavigny was not our equal; still, I could not but think my dear, kind, father's behaviour the more amiable and the better bred of the two.

"M. Chavigny was a sensible, unpretending, well-informed man; and, from what my father told us of him after his departure, it was difficult to conceive a more unsullied reputation, or a more honourable character. My father professed openly for him the profoundest esteem, and my mother was, consequently, obliged to declare that she would receive his future visits with pleasure.

"M. Chavigny had commenced life with a few thousand francs, but having had the good fortune to engage the affections of the only daughter of the notary in whose *étude* he was placed, he had, by a marriage with her, secured to himself a large inheritance, and advancement in his profession. On his father-in-law's death, succeeding to his *clientèle*, he had augmented his wealth so considerably, that, what with the profits of his profession, and some skilful hits

at the Bourse, he found himself, on his retirement from affairs, in possession of a magnificent income. His wife had died, leaving him one only son. . . ."

Madame de Boislambert stopped for an instant, and then, with an evident effort continued:

"M. Chavigny had become a constant guest at Beaumeillant, and though my mother had not in reality relaxed much in his favour, the undeniable esteem in which her husband held him, as an upright and truly honest man, forced her to conceal her disdain and to affect towards him, at least, the politeness of hospitality. She had even condescended so far, as to consent one day to go with my father and me to look at the house our neighbour was building. A very handsome edifice it certainly was; but bearing no marks whatever of the vulgar love of *étalage* so common to the *parvenus* of our day. This did not prevent my mother from giving us to understand, on our road home, in so many words, that it was a vast deal too splendid for a *bourgeois*.

"About a month had elapsed since M. Chavigny's first visit, when he requested from my mother the favour to be permitted to present his son, who had just returned from visiting most of the capitals of Europe, whither his father had sent him, under the care of a tutor, for a twelvemonth previous to his coming of age. My mother could not avoid consenting, and the next day Lionel Chavigny crossed our threshold for the first time."

The Marquise again paused.

"It would be useless in me, Lady Vernon," resumed she, "to describe to you the effect produced on me by the first appearance of this young man. No one entirely understands a sentiment in which he does not participate, and nothing can be more opposite than the objects which, in different people, are to be the causes of moral perturbation. I am not aware that Lionel Chavigny struck me as particularly good-looking—I only recollect that an unknown feeling sprang up almost instantaneously in my breast, and that feminine coquetry, revealing

itself for the first time, I experienced a decided wish to please the new guest.

"My mother was, if anything, less satisfied with the son than with the father. The old man, by his good sense and his modesty, contrived not to shock her actively, whereas Lionel, who belonged to another generation, and who had the full consciousness of the importance bestowed on him in the new political order of things, by his great wealth, was little disposed to make any concessions to what he considered the prejudices of a by-gone and worn-out *caste*.

"My father's brilliant military reputation, achieved by himself, independently of his name and family, commanded his undisguised respect, and his manners to him were infinitely more deferential than those he adopted towards my mother. The consequence was, that, whilst the latter stigmatized Lionel as 'a presumptuous, democratical coxcomb,' the former pronounced him to be 'a fine, independent, manly fellow.'

"I had no opinion on the subject, but felt

an instinctive delight in the presence of M. Chavigny's son, and my heart beat involuntarily every time he entered the room.

"From what I have heard of the gaiety of an English country-house, you can form no idea of the solitude of a French one. In the dulness that surrounded me, but which, I confess, I had not perceived till then, Lionel became my only resource. He was my constant companion, and I strove with all my power to compensate to him for the perpetual humiliations inflicted on him by my mother, and which I saw he neither forgave nor forgot. I was not aware that my heart was touched, or that there was in our intimacy, anything beyond a mere interchange of good-nature and kindness; when a circumstance, in appearance trifling, opened my eyes.

"We were to leave Beaumeillant for Paris in a week; when one evening (M. Chavigny and his son having dined with us,) my father received a letter which caused him a joyfulness he could not repress. Tapping me gently on

the cheek: 'There, *ma petite Louise!*' said he, gaily, 'there are good news for you from your *fiancé;* Boislambert returns from Africa in a couple of months, and then, *bon jour Madame la Marquise!*' My mother looked reprovingly; but her glance was answered by these words, (my father was exceedingly blunt,) '*Ma chère amie,* it is never too soon to be reminded that you are destined to have the honour of becoming a brave man's wife.'

"I was wretched, I scarcely knew why; but a glance at Lionel soon informed me—my cheek was not paler than his. Why our eyes met at that moment, I cannot tell; but they did so, and the dark despair I read in his, must, I am certain, have been but the reflection of what was visible in my own. I *loved* Lionel Chavigny, and now avowed it to myself."

"*Loved* him!" exclaimed Lady Vernon, in a trembling tone; "but surely, stronger proof was wanting to persuade you of such a crime!"

"Stronger proof," answered the Marquise, "what stronger proof could I have? Had I not loved him, what should I then have cared whom either of us was to wed? Besides, Lady Vernon, there was no crime *then*—I was not at that period a married woman."

Mildred sunk back in her chair, and with a sigh, "Continue, pray continue!" said she to Madame de Boislambert, as, bending down, she sought to conceal beneath the flowing curls of her hair, the burning blushes of her brow.

CHAPTER III.

"On the day that followed the incident I have described," resumed the Marquise, continuing her narrative, "I had agreed (in my mother's presence) to show Lionel a new method of colouring the distances in a landscape, *à l'Italienne*. My poor mother's naïve arrogance was such, that I believe she would scarcely have objected to the long excursions, which, without her knowledge, I had already taken once or twice with Lionel. She regarded him so completely in the light of an inferior, that the remotest idea of danger never entered her head. If any one had suggested it to her even, she would have laughed probably, and have replied,

that there could be no more danger than with a gardener or a groom.

"On the day I mention, he was to come at twelve o'clock; and mid-day was past, and he came not. Ten years have elapsed since then; but I remember it all as though it had happened but yesterday. I had prepared my drawing apparatus on a little table in the *salon*, rather behind my mother, who was busy at her tapestry-work in the embrasure of the old-fashioned window.

"Half past twelve o'clock struck—one! and half-past one, and no Lionel appeared. It may seem absurd to those who have never felt it; but few events of my life have made me more thoroughly heart-sick, than the first anxious waiting of that morning. From my seat, whilst appearing to be intent upon my landscape, I could observe the movements of the clock; and what seemed then the lightning-like flight of time, was watched by me with an intensity of which, probably, you have no conception.

"At last, my mother, who in her pride had forgotten that such persons as M. Chavigny or his son existed, turned to me, and suggested, after such hard work, the propriety of a little exercise. She added that the wind was too cold for her, and desiring me to wrap myself up warmly, sent me to take a walk, with her maid, through the alleys of what was called *le petit parc*.

"I did, on this occasion, what I had sometimes done before, (when my only object was freedom from the irksome attendance of a domestic,) I dispensed with the attendance of the abigail, and sallied forth alone. I cannot describe to you the reluctance I experienced at quitting the house, mixed with unquiet longing to be any where rather than where I was; I feared leaving the *salon*, lest Lionel should come during my absence; and at the same time, I had a kind of vague hope that I might, I knew not how, by going out, learn the cause of his absence.

"I strolled on through the park—turning

round at every step, starting at every breath, and expecting I knew not what,—till I reached the boundary of our woods, and found myself stopped by one of those stiles as common in Brittany as in your country.

"I opened the gate and passed onward into a narrow cross-road, which divided our woods from a considerable tract of forest land belonging to the *commune*. Opposite to me was a small hollow, formerly a gravel-pit, that had gradually clothed itself in green, and that intervened between the road and the wood.

"I crossed over and looked listlessly in the long grass for whatever autumn flowers might be visible. On the ridge of the hollow above me, the winds and frost had spared a magnificent fox-glove that I resolved to gather. I climbed up the little acclivity, but, as is frequent in places where quarries have been, the earth was scooped away, and the ridge projected above my head.

"I stretched out my hand in vain, and was just about to turn back and walk round to the

upper platform of the hollow, when another hand was stretched forth from behind me, and in a second the fox-glove lay at my feet. I did not scream, but I started, and involuntarily put my hand to my heart. Lionel Chavigny was behind me.

"I *could* tell you every word that passed between us then, for not a syllable but is engraved on my memory,—but I *will* not. In the first place, it is useless; in the next, it is a crime for me *now* to recall the raptures I then felt; and lastly, the remembrance of these first avowals of innocent affection is too holy a thing to be profaned.

"When I re-entered my own home, it was with a heart wholly devoted to Lionel, with a determination never to bear another's name, and an instinctive consciousness that I never should bear his. He had spoken to me bitterly of my mother's haughty bearing, and had added that, for my sake alone, he submitted to it with comparative patience. His passionate, (and I must, notwithstanding all, believe *then* sincere,)

tenderness for me, found expressions which surprised me far less by their novelty than by the ingenious way in which they interpreted and gave utterance to the sentiments I entertained for him.

"I was my mother's true daughter, not alone in features, but also in character and disposition. With all the ardour of her almost Eastern nature, I loved Lionel Chavigny, and with all her courage and resolution I decided that no power upon earth should force me to give my hand to another.

"Till we left Beaumeillant, I continued to meet Lionel every day; and the day that I parted from him, as he clasped me to his breast and imprinted on my lips the last kiss of chaste regard, he placed on my finger a plain gold ring, saying 'Louise! you are my betrothed wife.'

"I left Beaumeillant with my father and mother, and we returned to Paris. Lionel and I never exchanged a single letter; for, though I concealed from my parents the sentiment that

filled my whole heart, I could not condescend to keep up a system of falsehood and petty intrigue. Besides, such affection as ours did not need it. We were tranquil and strong in our reliance on each other. At least, those were my feelings. I seriously think that, at that period, I should have died if any one could have proved to me that Lionel either loved another, or cared less for me than he had pretended.

"I lay an emphasis on the word *if*, because I believe few enterprises would have been more difficult than that of persuading me of any thing of the sort. I relied upon Lionel—I believed in him—I loved him with all the beautiful truth, all the confidence, all the blindness of a girl's love.

"I was not unhappy; on the contrary, I lived in what I would fain call, if you will permit me, a state of ecstatic calmness. My attachment raised me immeasurably above the pitiful pre-occupations of those who surrounded me in the world; and, at little more than

sixteen, I had the placid contempt of a man of forty for all the vanities of society.

"I had told Lionel that I would have no secret from the Abbé de Nangis, and he had consented to my confiding our history to him. My first act on returning to Paris, was to fly to the confessional and recount all my pre-occupations to my spiritual adviser!

"M. de Nangis was deeply grieved at what had happened; and, for the first time, I thought him less indulgent to me than in my own opinion I deserved. He censured me severely for nourishing an attachment hidden from my parents, and of which I knew they could not approve, and besought me to vanquish my love for Lionel. After several months spent in Paris, I returned to Beaumeillant, more incapable than ever of overcoming a sentiment that entirely mastered me.

"I confessed this to M. de Nangis with so much sincerity and so much contrition, that at length he agreed to befriend me up to a certain point. I persuaded him (of what I was con-

vinced myself,) that I had no right, loving Lionel as I did, to marry M. de Boislambert. The latter had, luckily, not yet returned from Africa, so that I was spared the nearer approach of the actual marriage.

"M. de Nangis spoke seriously to my mother before our departure, and told her that, in his opinion, I was as yet too young to become a wife and mistress of a family; and thus a few months' respite was procured for me.

"I will pass over the description of our meeting after so long an absence. I forgot, for the first moment, the Abbé de Nangis, my mother, my anxieties, and even the idea of an eventually necessary resistance to my parents in the joy of seeing once more him I loved.

"Towards the middle of October, this year, my father fell ill, and we were obliged to return to Paris sooner than usual. We had scarcely accomplished our journey thither, established him in his own home, and called in his habitual medical attendant, when he died! Almost his

last words were for me; in dying, he besought his wife not to neglect solemnizing, upon the earliest occasion, my union with M. de Boislambert.

"From this moment, my mother and I had each of us our object, for which alone we lived, but this object was with each the direct opposite to that pursued by the other. My mother appeared to exist only to perform her husband's desire, and see me the wife of the Marquis de Boislambert; whereas I, on the other hand, literally only lived to escape from this union, and remain true to Lionel.

"The Marquis had returned from Algeria, and I had been presented to him as his affianced bride; but the marriage was not to take place until the year's mourning was out. This year we were to pass in seclusion at Beaumeillant, and the Marquis was to pay a visit to certain estates, which he had somewhat neglected during his late campaigns.

"Once more in Brittany, I perceived a change in my mother's manner towards the

Chavignys which I had certainly been far from anticipating. Instead of, as I supposed she would, treating them with undisguised and uncontrolled haughtiness, she, on the contrary, received them both with what in her was the nearest approach to cordiality. She seemed to think that now the husband she had so worshipped was no more; she could never sufficiently evince her respect for any opinion he might when alive have emitted.

"For this reason she sought out the persons he had esteemed, and took every occasion of showing them attention. She invited the elder M. Chavigny and his son perpetually; and from this time forward I never discovered in her the least wish to make either of them feel the superiority of her birth and position. They were almost daily with us, and I now, openly, and with her consent, made Lionel my constant companion. We walked, rode, drove, sang, and painted together, and yet my poor mother never perceived the least indication of what was passing within us; never dreamed that such a

monstrous anomaly could exist, as an attachment between her daughter and a notary's son!

"That year was not only the happiest of my life, but I should think, from what I have remarked, about the happiest that any living being ever passed upon this earth. I cruelly found the difference when we returned to Paris.

"Now began the struggle. The Abbé de Nangis, touched by my description of Lionel and my recital of our love, supported me indirectly, by trying to convince my mother that General de Boislambert was too old to be the husband of a girl of eighteen; but upon this point he found her inflexible. Her husband's wishes had been all enlisted on the side of this union; he had given his word to the Marquis, and upon his death-bed she had given hers to him, and nothing could have induced her to swerve from her resolution.

"I was, however, as determined as herself, and as resolved to keep my faith with Lionel as she could be not to break her promise to my father. Often I thought of disclosing to

her the whole, and telling her that, although I would not marry Lionel without her consent, I would equally resist to the death any marriage with another. But M. de Nangis induced me to abandon this idea, by procuring for me from my mother a respite of a year, at the end of which, I could but be in the same position, and reduced then to make the dreadful declaration.

"This year of probation passed like the rest, and as it drew towards its term I was on the point of having recourse to overt resistance, when a slight circumstance made a diversion in my favour. M. de Boislambert was ordered again to Algeria. Both he and my mother wished the marriage to take place before his departure, but I had her word to wait a year; and two months were yet wanting to its completion.

"The General quitted Paris, and I felt as though Heaven itself had intervened in my favour, and saved me from the frightful alternative. The Abbé, too, was not indisposed to recognise in this event a special favour of

Providence, and it did not make him think the worse of our cause.

"I had now arrived at the age of nineteen, and some of our friends began to wonder I was not yet married; but the habitual gravity and the distaste for the pleasures of the world, inspired by a profound passion, made me pass generally for a person more likely to go into a convent and take the veil, than to consent to enter into the world and become the wife of a man who was supposed not to be more imbued with piety and religious zeal, than are generally the *habitués* of a camp.

"One evening, we were surprised by the visit of Lionel Chavigny. He had lost his father suddenly, and was a prey to very profound and very sincere grief. He meant to travel for a short time (we were not likely to be in Brittany for six months, and in Paris he could not have mixed in our society), and he ventured to ask my mother if she had any commissions for her own country, as he thought it possible he might revisit Spain. She not

only gave him several commissions to execute for her, but actually offered him letters to many of the highest families, her relatives, in Madrid and Granada. He accepted gratefully, and departed.

"For the first time during the three years we had loved each other, I received a note from Lionel. He contrived to slip into my hands a piece of paper, on which was written these few words I have never forgotten :—

"'We are about to part, Louise, for some time. I *cannot* go to Brittany, and live *alone* there during your absence; I *will* not come to Paris, for reasons you must understand. Before parting, therefore, *may* I see you once? I will do only as you wish. But if you do not wish me to leave France without the solace of one word from you, be in the garden to-night when all are asleep.'

"When I was alone in my room, I read and re-read these few lines—hesitated—and at length could not resist the still, suppliant voice, that, after all, asked so little, and asked that

little so humbly. My room immediately adjoined my mother's—was, in fact, merely a cabinet annexed to her apartment; my only way of gaining the ground floor and the garden of the hotel was by passing through her room.

"My resolution once taken, I got up, dressed myself, and, with the tread of a mouse, and a beating heart, that, to my own ears, covered the sound of my footsteps, I stole through my mother's chamber while she slept, and reached the lower story in safety. Gently unbarring the shutters of the library window, that opened down to the ground, I stepped out into the garden. I had scarcely done so, when I saw a figure beckon to me from under the shade of the trees. I darted forward, and found myself in Lionel's arms. I did not then ask—I do not know at this hour—how he came there. But there he was; and some presentiment told me that it was our last interview, and that we should never again meet thus.

"Bitter were the tears that in my despondency I wept upon his bosom that night; and sad

were the forebodings which he had neither power nor inward conviction sufficient to chase from my mind. He knelt at my feet, and taking both my hands—'Louise,' said he, with a look and in a tone I never shall forget, 'you do not know what I have suffered, nor what I have resisted for your sake. You are ignorant now of what is in reality meant by the words Temptation and Sin; but a day may come when you will acknowledge that my conduct has not been altogether unworthy of praise. I have myself overcome temptation stronger than you can appreciate; I have saved you from sin, when, oftener than you are aware of, your rescue has depended upon me. You *may* cease to love me (not that I believe that possible); but remember, that you owe me some gratitude.'

"Hour after hour went by, and still we avoided the utterance of the last fatal word. At length Lionel, summoning courage for both of us, pressed me frantically to his heart; and the cold, quivering lips, that dared not say farewell, printed the final kiss upon mine. Tearing

himself away, he rushed from me, and, before I could speak, was out of sight. Oh! the anguish of that moment! I fell on the damp ground, resting my head upon the bench where we had sat together, and gave way to a paroxysm of despair that I thought must have broken my heart. I cannot dwell on this!—Suffice it to say, I regained my room and my bed without my mother suspecting that I had left either.

"Months passed, and the Marquis de Boislambert's return was announced to us in a letter from himself. My resolution had not undergone the least alteration, and I prepared to stand the explosion of my mother's anger. One morning—it is present to me even now—I took up the paper that lay on the breakfast-table, whilst my mother read a packet of letters just brought in by a servant, and on some of which I had remarked the Spanish post-mark. After carelessly casting my eyes over the columns, I was horribly fascinated by the following lines: 'We read in the *Heraldo:* Amongst the most joyous events of the carnival is to be classed the

marriage of our young and lovely countrywoman, Mademoiselle de Sant-Ildefonso, with a wealthy Frenchman, M. Chavigny. . . .'"

Lady Vernon started. "Heavens!" exclaimed she, interested more than she could have imagined in the Marchioness's history, "but I thought M. Chavigny . . . ."

"Wait!" resumed Madame de Boislambert; "you will soon know all. The quotation from the Spanish paper went on to state, that it was highly desirable that M. Chavigny should enter the Chamber of Deputies in his own country, and there become the supporter and advocate of an intimate alliance with Spain. I remember it all, for I read every line; and neither screamed, fainted, nor let the paper fall. I do not remember feeling either that I grew dizzy, or could not see. No! I simply felt that I had turned to stone, and that life had gone from me. A few moments after, my mother held up her hands—'Well!' sighed she, 'this is a fine state of things! My sister writes me from Granada: 'I find that the French gen-

tleman you recommended to me this winter has married the daughter of old Sant-Ildefonso. What is M. Chavigny's family?' 'Family, indeed!' resumed my mother; and she branched off into a tirade against *mésalliances*. I listened to the whole without flinching—I was too dead to every sensation even to suffer. A couple of hours later I was at the feet of the Abbé de Nangis, and had acquainted him with my determination to marry M. de Boislambert, and the entire cessation (and this I believed to be true) of my affection for Lionel. He advised me to be sure of this before I bound myself irrevocably; but added, that he could not but approve of my resolution, and that, as Lionel was for ever lost to me, I must labour to banish him from my thoughts. From my thoughts I never could banish him! he was *ever* there, and in my heart; but my tongue never named him more. I gave my hand to M. de Boislambert on his return from Africa, just a year after Lionel had left France.

"Six years elapsed. I was the mother of

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two children. During these six years I had never heard M. Chavigny's name mentioned. In the second year of my marriage I lost my mother, and then no one remained who could speak to me of the past; for no one else, save the Abbé, knew of Lionel's existence. I never would return to Brittany, and all links between us were broken. I learnt afterwards that some portion of that time he had spent out of France; but while in Paris, our circles were so distinct, and I so little familiar with what is termed general society, or the public, that we had no chance of crossing each other's paths.

"What with my husband's kindness to me, the admiring respect I could not help according to him, and that, but for one remembrance, would have turned to the sincerest affection,—what with all this, and the warmest love for my children, I really believe that the recollection of the past was beginning to wear out in my breast, when suddenly fresh fuel was thrown upon the flame, and the ashes I thought dead were re-kindled.

"It was one night late in last autumn, I had gone with the General to the Grand Opera. We were in one of the stage boxes. About half-past nine o'clock, towards the end of the musical piece (the attraction of the night was a *ballet*), the entrance of a gentleman into the box opposite to ours arrested my entire attention. I had recognised Lionel, and *felt* he had recognised me. A friend of my husband's joined us for the ballet. He was a member of the Jockey Club, and an *habitué* of the societies we, on our side of the water, did not frequent. I turned to him, and, pretexting my ignorance of all that passed in the *monde des lions*, asked him the names of those who occupied different boxes in the house. This forced him to name Chavigny.

"'Oh!' I replied; 'the gentleman who married a countrywoman of my mother's—Mademoiselle de Sant-Ildefonso!'

"My companion stared, and then, laughing heartily: 'Indeed, Madame la Marquise,' rejoined he, 'you did not overrate the disdain

with which you honour the members of the modern Parisian world. Chavigny married!' And my informant's merriment grew more irrepressible still. 'How I should make him laugh if I were to tell him that! Why,' continued he, luckily not perceiving that I was undergoing tortures which must have reflected themselves upon my countenance, 'Chavigny would sooner drown himself than marry. *He believes in no living woman!*'

"I answered not a word, but I felt that *I* it was who had dried up the springs of kindness in his heart; I, who had thought myself betrayed; I, who was, after all, the betrayer! The anguish I felt, and the remorse at my involuntary guilt, restored, in its pristine force, my former love for Lionel. I felt sure—oh, pride! how cruelly punished!—that there could be no *danger* for me, that my honour must always be safe; but I longed to see once more him I had so deeply and so unconsciously offended, and to tell him how I had been deceived.

"Unfortunately, the Abbé de Nangis had left

Paris some months before, to go to Rome, or he would have told me, what I soon acknowledged to myself, that it was not well to see Lionel again. A little reflection sufficed to show me this, and I resolved to avoid meeting M. Chavigny, which I supposed would be no difficult matter, judging from what had hitherto happened. But it was not to be.

"One fatal morning, at a breakfast at Madame du C—'s, at St. Ouen, Lionel advanced towards me, bowed, and after a few words, seated himself beside me. But oh! how altered he was! Not in looks, except that he was somewhat paler and had a harsher expression; but in mind and opinions. His conversation was one tissue of doubt, disdain, and irony. He spoke seriously of what I looked upon as trivial, and lightly of what seemed to me sacred. More than once the tears sprang to my eyes, for I felt myself wounded to the soul.

"I could not help at last, in the midst of what, in our position, appeared to me a misplaced exhibition of unfeeling mirth, interrupting

him by these words: 'After such a parting as ours, such a meeting is strange!'

"I thought a shade passed over his face; but it was momentary. 'Ah!' said he, carelessly, 'it is very good of you, Madame la Marquise, to remember such a circumstance; that, too, if I recollect, took place in a garden,' and he laughed as people do when they laugh *par politesse*.

"This was too much. I rose and walked away; and I, who had thought no danger could threaten me—I, who had resolved to fly from Lionel—I was now wretched unto death because I doubted of his affection. Alas! what right had I to mourn over his lost love? That love which I had thrown away, (at least so he was entitled to think), and that too late I wanted to regain!

"I was not wise in the world's ways. Lionel, on the contrary, was a master. I will not accuse him; but I fear, in all that ensued, he merely listened to the dictates of an unworthy vengeance. From the day of Madame du

C—'s breakfast, I went nowhere without meeting him, and, unconsciously, I began now to go everywhere. I found some reason for accepting each invitation, and, before I was aware of it, my first occupation on entering every house was to search for Lionel. I thought that all I wished was to explain to him what had happened, and justify my own conduct; but, as he demanded no explanation, this state of things was insensibly prolonged.

"One day, however, it came, and I learnt how cruelly we had both been the sport of fate. A M. Charles Havigny had married in Madrid Mademoiselle de Sant-Ildefonso; and the Spanish papers, copying carelessly the name, preceded by an initial, thus, M. C. Havigny, had transformed it into M. Chavigny. My aunt wrote to my mother, from Granada, under the same erroneous impression, which probably in her mind remains to this day unrectified; and the Paris papers, always glad to announce any piece of news concerning a person known in

society, had simply repeated the words of the Madrid Journal. Thus were we both lost!

"Lionel, luckily, believed my story, because a friend of his own had written to him at Berlin some months later, to compliment him on his marriage with a celebrated Spanish beauty and a grandee of the first class. He had, however, previously read the announcement of my marriage, and therefore, although it struck him that I, like his friend, might have been deceived by public report, the first impression, unfavourable to my truth, was made.

"He seemed, at times, to forget every thing but the remembrance of our early love, and then he would mourn over us both; but in fact—(I was less sure of this *then* than I am now)—he never entirely restored to me his esteem. He thought that, had I really loved him as I had said, I should have waited to know from himself that he had proved faithless, and should not have precipitated a marriage with another.

"He did not choose to take into account the various ways in which suffering and disappointment act on different organizations; and in one respect, this gave him an undeniable advantage over me; inasmuch as it persuaded me he would not have acted as I did, and tended to prove that his love for me was greater (in appearance, at least,) than mine for him. Pray to Heaven, Lady Vernon, that you may never know the fatal strength given to a man you love by any injustice you may have done him!

"Lionel had me already in his power, and I knew it not. I had still a blind confidence in my own force, and I went on boldly defying fate. I saw that Lionel was changed in character, but I did not know to what an extent. Blinded by my own affection for him, I did not perceive that he no longer believed in it, that he held the whole female sex in utter contempt, and that I even, *did not form an exception.*

"Lionel was a thorough Frenchman; and if you lived long in this country, you would

learn to know the fearful meaning of that word. He had grown positive in his ideas, and attached importance now solely to those things which they who are capable of a profound sentiment, despise.

"As *the* woman he had loved with all the enthusiasm of youth, I no longer existed in his eyes. I was but one of that perfidious sex with whom, according to him, the other is engaged in a perpetual and natural warfare.

"All this was not revealed to me until it was too late; but, above all, I did not attach sufficient importance to the fact of Lionel's having attained the age of thirty-two, and having dissipated more than half his fortune. I forgot every other consideration in the intensity of my love for him, and in the wild longing to convince him of its truth.

"And all this, as usual, was masked to myself by a vain show of morality. I was persuaded that never was my husband's honour safer; I should have been incensed to the highest degree with any one who should have

dared tell me I was on the high road to crime, and I fondly thought that my ardent and (as yet) pure attachment for another, was perfectly compatible with my duty to M. de Boislambert.

"The Abbé de Nangis alone could have saved me, by opening my eyes and making me see the truth; but he was absent. I exaggerated the sin I had involuntarily committed, in order that I might be allowed to exaggerate the compensation due. I *liked* to think that I had ruined Lionel, destroyed his happiness, blighted his prospects in life; for then, my devotion to him seemed to my perturbed vision a kind of obligation, a sacred duty. . . Ah! Lady Vernon, you do not know, when passion has once attained the mastery over reason, by what an empty, yet all-powerful system of sophistry, it leads us into the tortuous ways of guilt!

"My doom was sealed; and I was yet walking erect amidst the crowd, proudly raising my head above the rest, arrogantly confident in my own virtue, as though it were a merit of

mine, and not a loan from Heaven, which at any moment it might please Heaven to recall; whilst the Tempter had already marked me for his own.

"M. de Boislambert was called into the provinces. His absence was not to be prolonged beyond a fortnight. One evening, I had driven to the Bois de Boulogne (it was towards the middle of April last); at the turning of an alley I perceived a horseman, riding in the direction of St. Cloud, and all my thoughts were irresistibly fixed on one object;—I had recognised Lionel; and I could not distract my attention from his image.

"I returned home uneasy and wretched. I could pursue no occupation. I was incapable of applying myself to aught but one fixed idea. The evening wore on, and night came. All in the house, except myself; I sent my maid to rest, and remained alone. Midnight struck. I opened the window, and, attracted by the beauty of the moon, walked out into the garden. The night was unusually warm for the season,

and the air from the trees and gardens around, came charged with the fresh odours of violets and spring flowers. I seated myself on a bench, under the shade of a wide spreading lilac just breaking into bloom, and abandoned myself to the current of my thoughts.

"Seen by the uncertain light of the moon, I could almost fancy myself back in the garden of the Hôtel Beaumeillant. Little by little, present events lost their reality, and I fell under the exclusive influence of the past. I thought of that night when I met Lionel for the last time; and, giving way to the melancholy tenderness inspired by such recollections, and believing myself hidden from all eyes, I could neither restrain my tears, nor the word that rose to my lips.

"'Lionel!' I could not help exclaiming in my sad bitterness of soul; but the word was answered; and, before I could rise, before I was aware what had happened—Lionel Chavigny was at my feet!

"Lady Vernon," resumed the Marchioness,

"I will neither expatiate upon, nor excuse what happened on that fatal night. But I will simply submit this to your judgment: I was, after a long separation, which separation I accused myself of having caused, and for which I thought I owed atonement,—I was once more alone with the object of my early love. I was dreaming, and lost before consciousness returned. The events of the last six years had faded from my memory, and I only saw myself again, on the night previous to his departure, with the being to whom I had sworn eternal faith. But the difference was great between the girl of nineteen and the woman of five-and-twenty; and if I had once owed gratitude to Lionel, I owed him such no longer, and the debt was dearly paid!

"When I awoke to a sense of the reality, I became like one distracted, and my first impulse was to fly from him who had proved to me, so ungenerously, how entirely I was in his power. The anguish, the agony I suffered when alone, is not to be described.

"I shut myself up, and let not even the daylight penetrate into the apartment where I lay. I had, however, taken my resolution—a wrong one perhaps, but the only one that seemed admissible to my troubled conscience. Had my husband been there, I would have confessed all to him, and submitted implicitly to his sentence; but even he was absent, and I was totally alone. *Lie*, I could not; and the idea of concealing from the General what had happened—of continuing to receive his and the world's respect, appeared to me the most immoral, the most infamous of all deceptions.

"Had the Abbé de Nangis been there, I should have flown to him, and he might yet have saved me from the extreme measure I adopted. As it was, I saw no other path but that which led from my husband's door; and in taking it, I thought I did right. But where to go? It was no longer inclination that drove me to Lionel—if it had been, I should have resisted it. No! it was a mistaken feeling of duty; but the profound sense of the shame and

misery I should endure in again beholding the cause of my culpability, made me believe it was proper I should do so: the certainty that there *was* a sacrifice induced me to make it. *I no longer loved Lionel;* but I imagined that he was the person to whom I ought, in honour, to apply, and that, faithless to my husband, I was bound to be true to him.

"Oh! you can never conceive the depth of humiliation to which I was sunk by this thought. My sufferings at leaving my children and my home were slight in comparison with the overwhelming shame that bowed me down as I dragged myself up Lionel's stairs; but Heaven, in its mercy, ordained that *that* should be the commencement of the work of expiation. The first words addressed to me by Lionel raised my courage. He, too, with all apparent tenderness, discarded me; and, as I ventured to despise him, I thanked Heaven for the lesson, however severe, and rejoiced that no duty commanded me henceforth to support the presence of him for whose sake I had descended from my 'high estate.'

"I wandered forth alone, and for that day and the following, concealed myself in the humble lodging of a poor woman who had been my nurse, and whose devotion to me was boundless. On the third, I started for Brussels with the passports we contrived to procure, under the name of Madame Fournier (and an attendant), which name I have continued to bear ever since."

The Marquise paused.

"But you soon decided to return to France?" interrogated Lady Vernon.

"Alas!" replied Madame Boislambert, with a sigh, "my punishment was not of a day. I soon lived but upon regret for all I had lost. My kind, my noble husband, my sweet children, the Abbé de Nangis, Clémentine! all these rushed back upon my memory, and I determined to return where I could, myself unseen, from time to time enjoy the sad pleasure of beholding them. I knew I had none of those steps to fear from M. de Boislambert, which force a guilty wife to escape from her native

country; at the end of six weeks, I again arrived in Paris with my faithful Marceline; and, sending her to enquire at various *bureaux* for a country residence, I soon heard of the cottage I now inhabit.

"My first step, when I had once made sure of an obscure abode, was to throw myself at the feet of the Abbé de Nangis. I went to his own house, for I would not bind him to the secrecy of the confessional, and it was his voluntary act to decide upon becoming a tacit party to my concealment. Too much abject despair is not good for the mind—it ends by disordering and degrading it. I felt this when, for the first time since my crime, I knelt absolved before the sacred tribunal, and dared to partake of the communion.

"I arose thence a better woman, but I hope not a less humbled penitent. My life was so hidden that even you do not know how all my days were employed. Twice or three times a week I hired a carriage, which I took at Annecy, and drove to Paris; where, closely

veiled and dressed in a manner which should prevent any one from recognising in me the Marquise de Boislambert, I sought out my children at their wonted hours of recreation in the Tuileries; and there would I, the reproved one, sit and silently watch their gambols.

"One day, about a week ago, I was put to a severe trial. Sitting close to one of the trees in the *Grande Allée*, seemingly occupied under my veil with a book, I had fixed my eyes on the figures of my sweet little ones as they played near me with some infant companions. Suddenly, Octave cast his ball rather too far, and it rolled under my feet, whither the child flew to fetch it. This was an opportunity I could not withstand. I snatched him up, and wildly pressing him to my heart, covered him with convulsive kisses.

"My veil hid my features completely, and I passed undiscovered both by the half-frightened boy and by the governess and servant whom their present guardian, Madame de Sestrières, had appointed to watch over them. Turning to the governess,—

"'Madame,' said I, 'you will, I trust, forgive my behaviour to your little charge, when I tell you that I have just lost a son of his age, and of whom he is the living image.' The lady bowed politely and we separated; but my heart ached bitterly."

"Then," interrupted Lady Vernon, with sudden intuitiveness, "when I first met you, the carriage that had just passed—"

"Contained *my* children!" replied the Marchioness. "I saw them then for the first time, for the Abbé de Nangis had not discovered the exact place for their daily walk, nor its hour. They had been, as I learnt afterwards, taken to spend the day at Enghien with a friend of Madame de Sestrières, and were on their road home to Paris. Poor darlings!" resumed the Marquise with tears in her eyes, "who will watch over them? For Octave I fear less—but Marie!—who will shield her from harm!"

Lady Vernon took Madame de Boislambert's hand,—"*He* who has permitted that your sin should be no greater," said she, kindly.

The Marquise took both Mildred's hands in hers, and looking earnestly in her face, "Lady Vernon!" said she with tender energy, "I have so deeply suffered for my errors, that I may be allowed to advise." Mildred grew pale, and bent her eyes to the ground. "You are too young—you do not know the danger to which you are exposed. Let me feel," pursued she, with still more affectionate earnestness, "that my history will be a warning!"

Madame de Boislambert would have said more, but Mildred, drooping her head upon the Marquise's shoulder, murmured in scarcely audible accents, but with a firm emphasis, "*It shall!*" and, in the warm embrace exchanged by the two friends, Lady Vernon tacitly acknowledged that the lesson was accepted.

CHAPTER IV.

MILDRED had been deeply, painfully impressed by the history of Madame de Boislambert's life. She had, at almost every incident related by the Marquise, seen clear into the depths of her own heart; and in this recital of "an erring sister's shame," she traced the reflection of her own unconscious deviations from the straight path of rigid right. She was nearly as much surprised as shocked. She had considerable difficulty in believing what her conscience told her to be the truth;—but, once admitted *as* a truth, Lady Vernon hesitated not a second.

Mildred's had been an illiberal, but was

a strictly virtuous nature. The discovery of what was working within her, had done her infinite good in a moral point of view, inasmuch as it had taught her, that virtue was, at *no* time, and to *no* one, the easy thing she had imagined; and that, as the strongest might be attacked, the weaker might succumb. She had learned indulgence towards the rest of God's creatures, without relaxing in her severity towards herself!

Mildred knew now that she *loved* Gaston de Montévreux, loved him as she had never loved Sir Edward; but no weakness stole with this conviction into her heart. She did not think of herself, nor waste self-compassion on her own sufferings. She determined to *act* as it became a loyal gentlewoman, whose self-respect is dearer to her than life. This might be pride, but it was the right species of pride,—that which, instead of seeking to humble others, directs all its arms against itself.

The more Mildred reflected, the more she perceived how near she had been to feeling for

M. de Montévreux, at the end of a few months, what in Madame de Boislambert's case was to be excused by long years of affection. Lady Vernon was shocked, and could not forgive herself for the many absurd and cruel speeches she had, in her ignorance, so often made in the presence of the unhappy Marquise.

This, however, was the produce of the excitement of the hour. Mildred was under the influence of a kind of enthusiasm, which, though not exactly dangerous, is still far from the quiet composure which is the characteristic of the Immutable—of that which no change can affect, and no effort overthrow.

Under the present circumstances, Lady Vernon's conduct to Gaston was completely altered. She not only avoided every occasion of being alone with him, but when with him in the presence of others, her behaviour was constrained and reserved. She now tried heartily and sincerely to draw nearer to her husband—to look more leniently upon his transgressions, and endeavour, by kindness of manner, if not by

absolute affection (that was no longer in her power) to reclaim him from the disastrous courses whereon he was engaged.

Lady Vernon resolved that, henceforward, nothing should prevent her from discharging her duty to Sir Edward to the utmost limit of her capacity. She determined to leave no means untried to awaken him to a sense of what was right, and strictly promised herself not to swerve from the line of undeviating gentleness she had marked out in her own mind.

One morning, somewhat more than a month after the duel between the Viscount and Sir Edward, Lady Vernon received a little note from Madame de Moreton, requesting to see her in the afternoon at the cottage. The Duchess, who brought the letter, made Mildred observe, that after what had occurred between their respective husbands, Clémentine and herself could only meet on neutral ground; "but," she added, "my cousin's affection for you is far too sincere to allow of her not seizing

anxiously every possible occasion of seeing you, thus."

Lady Vernon, having gladly agreed to the rendezvous, sallied forth at the appointed hour, with the Marchioness, for the abode of the latter. The Viscountess had arrived before them, and, in virtue of an order given by Madame de Boislambert to her trusty Marceline, she had been admitted into the little *salon* where they found her. The instant she perceived Mildred, she sprang forward with fawn-like grace, and affectionately throwing her arms about her neck:

"Ah! dear Lady Vernon!" exclaimed she; "I am so happy!"

Mildred gazed on the Viscountess with tender interest. Assuredly, never was the triumph of mind over matter more visible than in that slight form.

As the three friends seated themselves on a couch—Mildred and Madame de Boislambert on either side of the Viscountess, the latter

took in her hands a hand of each, and joining them upon her heart:

"I have no wish ungratified now," said she; "for I leave my Louise with a friend who will be kind to her, and talk to her sometimes of me; and I commit Lady Vernon to the care of a saint who will teach her to wait patiently until he whom she loves returns to her."

"Leave!" exclaimed Mildred. "*Chère Vicomtesse!* what are you talking of?"

Clémentine drew Lady Vernon towards her, and, tenderly kissing her cheek; "Yes," replied she with a joyousness that pierced through all she said; "there is my secret! But you shall know it; for you will rejoice. To-morrow, at this hour, we shall be on the road to Italy."

"But how?" interposed Mildred. "I don't quite comprehend. Is M. de Moreton . . . ."

"Yes!" rejoined the Viscountess; "Armand is recommended the air of Naples, and he takes me with him."

Madame de Boislambert put her hand gently on her friend's mouth. "Let *me* tell the story

as it is, Clémentine," said she, "since Lady Vernon knows all. And, turning to Mildred: "I was present at M. M——'s (naming a celebrated Parisian physician) visit two days ago. Having pronounced the patient in a fair way towards recovery, if sent to a warm climate, he drew aside this poor child into the corner of the room where I was standing, and looking her full in the face: 'Madame,' said he abruptly, 'your husband will require unremitting care and attention for the next two years at least. If you are capable of affording him such, you had best go with him to Italy; but your duties henceforward will be those of a nurse; are you prepared to perform them?'

"Ah! dear M. M——," interrupted Madame de Moreton; "if he had but known the joy . . ."

"Just be pleased to be silent for one moment," said the Marchioness, with gentle authoritativeness; "I wish, Lady Vernon, you could have seen the look with which she answered M. M——. It melted even him; and on going away he kissed her hand with positive

reverence, and said to her: 'I have now no uneasiness about our patient.'"

"Well, but *franchement*, dearest Louise," observed the Viscountess, "do you think that the sacrifice of one's whole life would not be more than amply repaid by the tenderness Armand evinces for me? I wish you could have seen the expression of his face when I asked him if he would let me go with him to Italy. Since then, we do nothing but make plans and projects; and I assure you, dear Lady Vernon, my affection for you must be strong, to have made me renounce to-day so many hours of castle-building. We are to have a *palazzo* at Naples first, and then, towards spring, a villa at Castelamare; and when the warm weather comes on, Armand will lie upon cushions which I will arrange for him *à l'orientale;* and I will read to him till he falls asleep. You will see how I shall spoil him!"

At the end of an hour, Madame de Moreton rose to depart. Her carriage was stationed at the corner of the lane, and her two friends

accompanied her to it. Not even her regret at parting with the Marchioness could entirely damp the joy that glowed within her, and the tears that filled her eyes as she bade adieu to her friends, could not quench the rays of the sun that had risen upon her heart.

Happy, happy Madame de Moreton! She was so, indeed; and so thought Lady Vernon, as, with a feeling almost allied to envy, she watched for the last glimpse of the equipage that bore Clémentine to her now anxiously-waiting and tenderly grateful husband.

Poor Mildred! Do what she would, she could not disguise that she was returning to no one who counted the minutes till she came; and had *he* done so, would that, now, have made Lady Vernon so very happy? There was the worst! Poor Mildred had no love in her heart that, later, might conduce to her comfort; and that love which, spite of all her efforts, she felt buried in its depths, was an unholy love for an object she might not name.

"She is indeed happy, Madame de Moreton,"

said Mildred musingly, as she paused on the threshold of her own door.

"And so will you be, too, one day," rejoined the Marchioness affectionately.

"We will hope," said Lady Vernon, sadly.

"And *pray!*" added Madame de Boislambert with solemnity.

Mildred humbly bowed her head in token of assent.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE MORETON had gone to Italy with her husband, and Mildred was left to envy her happiness, in the society of the Duchess and Madame de Boislambert. Unlike the Viscount, whom Aurélie's conduct had radically cured of his passion, Sir Edward's thoughts were fixed on nothing but Madame de Cévèzes. He had scarcely begun to recover, and to be allowed to lie on a sofa in the room adjoining his bed-chamber, when the Baroness sent to enquire whether he were not yet permitted to receive the visits of his friends!

The message was delivered by Lady Vernon's *femme de chambre*, in the presence of the

Duchesse de Montévreux. A pause ensued—Mildred looked at her husband—he looked at the ground—Madame de Montévreux looked at both.

"Tell Madame la Baronne de Cévèzes," answered Mildred, in a firm tone, "that Sir Edward Vernon will have the honour of receiving her," and, without remarking her husband's look of astonishment, rather than admiration, (for he was in truth more ashamed than touched,) she crossed over to the Duchess, and, taking her arm, left the room.

They had, however, hardly reached the first landing-place, when, between the bars of the balustrades, they perceived the shining of colours, and heard on the stairs a vague rustling, like the indistinct flutter of a covey of birds on the wing. One step more and they were face to face with the *lionne!*

Young, fresh, and beautiful, (had it not been for the expression of her mouth,) the Baroness, assuming her most fascinating smile, advanced, nothing daunted, towards the pair. Madame de Montévreux felt Mildred's arm tremble

within her's; but half a glance sufficed to show her it was more from rage than fear.

Lady Vernon looked magnificently beautiful thus. Drawing herself up to her full height, and, conjointly with the Duchess, necessarily impeding the progress of Madame de Cévèzes up the stairs, she stopped for one second, and gave herself the pleasure of eyeing her rival from head to foot; then, drawing, with her companion, to one side, whilst an imperceptibly contemptuous smile wreathed her lip, she, without bowing to her, let the Baroness pass. A Frenchwoman would not have done this, nor did Madame de Montévreux approve of it; but it was beyond Lady Vernon's power to control the movement, and Aurélie entered Sir Edward's room so profoundly incensed that she resolved to hide carefully from him her displeasure.

Whilst, with shameless impudence, a stranger was thus supplanting the wife by the husband's bed-side, that wife was expected to throw from her and repulse the affection that another was eagerly waiting to offer to her. And she did

so, conscientiously and courageously. The more so, too, that she found how difficult the undertaking had now become.

When she saw M. de Montévreux's look of fond anxiety and discreet tenderness fixed upon her, and following her wherever she went, her heart yearned towards him, and she longed to hold out her hand, and, by one little word at least, express her gratitude; but she dared not, and her ostensible behaviour to the Duke still continued to bear the same unvarying character of reserve. Gaston was evidently annoyed and unhappy, and this did not tend to set Mildred's heart at rest. There is no grief so difficult to support, in those who are dear to you, as that which you are forced to cause, and are not permitted to console.

Lady Vernon perceived that the struggle was beginning to be too severe, and she resolved to find safety in flight. She had decided that, as soon as Sir Edward was able to move, and should be well established in his new Parisian residence, she would herself accept his former offer, and go to England on a visit to her

aunt. But an unforeseen event rendered this unnecessary.

Some troubles had broken out in the neighbourhood of one of the Duke's family estates near Alençon, which, though slight, had been sufficient to produce considerable damage to a portion of his property, and endanger the lives of several of his tenants. It was suggested to him that, without a moment's delay, he ought to hasten to the scene of action, and, by his presence, seek to prevent further evil, or remedy that which was already done. For some time past, M. de Montévreux had been urged strenuously not to postpone visiting his possessions in the Mayenne, on account of a legal process he had instituted against a *commune*, which had sought to usurp certain lands belonging, before the revolution, to his father.

Gaston well knew that his presence was necessary, but he could not make up his mind to quit the spot where Mildred was. The outbreak in the province where his property was situated, was, however, a thing not to be trifled with; and this was too peremptory a

call to be resisted. The Duke, therefore, much against his inclination, resolved to leave Paris and its neighbourhood, and, on arriving one morning at the château, announced his departure for the next day.

He came early, in order to lose no chance of being at least for some moments alone with Mildred; but no such chance presented itself. Madame de Boislambert was always there; nor did Lady Vernon separate herself for a single instant from her friend.

Just before dinner the Duchess drove down, but Gaston, foreseeing this, had come to the valley on horseback, and determined to be independent. Dinner passed, and the little party adjourned to the drawing-room, and gathered round the bright fire that was crackling upon the hearth. Madame de Montévreux and the Marquise occupied the two *fauteuils* on either side of the chimney-piece, and were soon engaged; the former, in finishing a red and gold Algerian purse, the latter, in knitting some coarse worsted stockings, whilst Mildred, established nearer to the table, bent

down over some tapestry whence her attention had scarce once been diverted during the whole day.

Gaston sat at a little distance from her, resting his arm upon the table, supporting his head with his hand, and, safe from the observation of his mother and the Marchioness, rivetting his every look upon Lady Vernon. She felt it, and it agitated her beyond what she could well disguise from him.

He marked the alternate paleness and flushing of the cheek, the fluttering of the unquiet heart, and the forced, unnatural manner of everything she did; whether she moved or remained still, whether she spoke or remained silent. And yet he was not satisfied, and he would gladly have quarrelled with Mildred, had there been any means of making up the quarrel afterwards.

Selfish, unkind Gaston! was it not enough that she dared not raise her eyes, and that, when forced to address you, her voice assumed a tone that, spite of your anger, thrilled through every nerve of your being? What would you have sought for under those drooping lids? An expression that, *had it not been hidden*,

you would have valued less! What more explicit tale would you have had told by that languid voice?—One that if *told*, you might have chosen to disbelieve? Ah! what a volume that would be, that should contain a list of all the wayward acts of petty injustice done by lovers to those they best love!

They had had an animated conversation on modern Italian music, which the Duke at last interrupted by suggesting that Lady Vernon should sing one of Schubert's ballads. Mildred then became the object of the entreaties of both her friends; and, feeling comparatively but little of her former timidity before others, since she had consented to let Gaston hear her sing, she acceded without much difficulty to their request. Madame de Montévreux petitioned for "*l'Adieu.*"

The *Adieu* it was she sung. Beautifully she sang it; so beautifully that Madame de Boislambert rose, and taking leave of the party, went away; probably too much oppressed by unwelcome recollections, to be fit for anything but solitude.

A little after ten o'clock, Madame de Montévreux also asked for her carriage, and Gaston, irritated by all that had occurred, formed the desperate resolution of letting her depart alone. He had already murmured something about having only ordered his horse at eleven, when Lady Vernon interrupted him by saying that she hoped he would consider himself as quite at home, and at liberty to do exactly what he liked.

"I fear," said she, with downcast eyes, "that I cannot offer you my company, for I must go and attend upon Sir Edward; but you will find plenty of books, and the papers...."

"*Mille grâces*," replied the Duke, with a polite bitterness he could not control—"I have about as small a capacity for the profound politics of the *Journal des Débats*, as for our own orthodox *Quotidienne*, and therefore will not profit by your gracious offer; but if you will afford me hospitality during the time that I shall be obliged to wait, I will send for my horse immediately; as I start before day-break to-morrow," added he, ill-naturedly, "it is as well I should get a good night's rest."

As the Duchess stepped into her *coupé*, Mildred bade adieu to Gaston at the same moment that she said good night to his mother; and the wheels of Madame de Montévreux's carriage were scarcely in motion, ere Lady Vernon was mounting the staircase leading to her husband's apartment. A few moments later, Gaston was apprized that his horse waited for him at one of the lesser gates of the park. (The Duke had a habit of leaving the château from this side.)

M. de Montévreux crossed the park in no gentle mood, and mounting his willing steed, began to belabour him with rein and spur. As he passed the garden of the cottage, he perceived in the moonlight a tall dark figure leaning over the little gate into the road, and, on approaching nearer, a voice called upon his name. He dismounted and bowed to Madame de Boislambert, whom he had recognised.

"You are angry, and unjustly so, M. le Duc," said she, holding out her hand to him.

"I have no right to be angry," replied he, with a bitter laugh; "but—"

The Marquise interrupted him. "But you would not like, before me, to say all the ungallant things you think of our sex."

Gaston looked confused.

"For shame!" resumed Madame de Boislambert, gently, "this is not worthy of you —you would do *her* a grievous injustice— and you know it—and this, from the mere promptings of your wounded vanity!"

"No, on my soul!" exclaimed Gaston, with sincere warmth. "There is not a particle of vanity in the feelings with which she has inspired me."

The Marchioness looked at him fixedly. "Examine yourself conscientiously," said she gravely. "What is that sentiment, which, if attended by the success it aspires to, must sacrifice her happiness in this world, and her soul's eternal welfare in the next, for the satisfaction of—what shall I call it, since you refuse to let it bear the name of vanity?"

"Call it my devotion," said the Duke, "the ardent, sincere devotion of my heart and soul!"

"Ardent and sincere!" echoed Madame

de Boislambert. "Fine words these! but why not say also, disinterested and pure?"

"You are too severe, Madame la Marquise," rejoined Gaston.

"I have a *right* to be so," answered she. "Listen to me, M. le Duc; I am willing to believe, to be convinced, that you, at the present moment, love Lady Vernon with what appears to you, a real, an all-absorbing affection; that is to say, no actress or opera-dancer has yet inspired you with the like; but let us suppose for an instant that you were to succeed; would *that* be sufficient? Do you feel within you the force of renunciation, the self-abnegation necessary for the work of requital, for the payment of the immense sacrifice you would not hesitate to accept?"

Gaston was silent.

"No," resumed the Marchioness, "you do not, and therein you are sincere; but for that very reason, and because you feel yourself inadequate to the support of the responsibility you would so lightly assume, you try to cast off the conviction of the responsibility itself,—you

disbelieve the sacrifice;—and now," pursued she with energy, "let me tell you, that a sacrifice there *would* be, such as you do not dream of; such as, if you comprehended it, you would dread, and die rather than accept."

M. de Montévreux looked seriously, but no longer angrily, in the face of the Marchioness. "Yes," she added, "do not judge of her by those who surround you. She has received a different education, and is of a different nature. I will not tell you, M. le Duc, (although such is my conviction,) that neither you nor any other created being of your sex will ever succeed with Lady Vernon,—for that would only excite your curiosity and your vanity;—but I will entreat of you, before you go further, before you allow yourself to feel incensed at her legitimate defence, to examine whether you have *the right* even to wish from her a sacrifice you have neither the power nor the will to repay?"

Gaston hesitated; Madame de Boislambert took both his hands in hers: "M. de Montévreux," said she, "we have passed through childhood and early youth together;—our

fathers, our mothers, were friends. There is a something, in the intimacy which dates from one's first infantine games, that forbids distrust and invites confidence. You know that I can have *no object* in what I say. You know that my affection for all who bear your name is unalterable. Gaston," added she, with still-increasing earnestness, "for *my* sake, spare Lady Vernon, or at least, during the absence you are about to make, reflect well upon the limit to which your own feelings of *honour* will allow you to go."

As the Duke rode homewards, he *did* reflect very profoundly on the words of Madame de Boislambert. He was almost inclined to avow to himself that his pursuit of Lady Vernon was not right, was not generous. But then he loved her so dearly! (when men are sure of *that*, they are inclined to think themselves exempt from every other consideration.) But, above all, Gaston was sorry that his voice should have been the first to announce to such women as Madame de Cévèzes and Madame Ferrières, the disgrace of Madame de Bois-

lambert. He reproached himself bitterly with having allowed fashionable failings, and vices not his own, to get so far the better of his higher and more honest sentiments as to lead him into speaking lightly of the guilt and of the ruin of a friend who, as she had reminded him, had played with him at that age when each was obliged to hold by the other's hand to give support to their inexperienced steps.

A fortnight after M. de Montévreux's departure, in the first days of November, Sir Edward and Lady Vernon quitted Montmorency to inhabit their house in the Champs Elysées; and Mildred bade adieu to the Marchioness, who, with more sorrow than she chose to acknowledge, saw herself once more condemned to the solitude of her obscure home. Sir Edward's wound, although not a dangerous one, had been productive of consequences not entirely without a serious character to a constitution far from robust. His chest had never been remarkable for strength; and Doctor Bertrand, before he took a definitive leave of Lady Vernon, warned

her to watch over him as much as possible in this respect.

Mildred had, therefore, a double motive for trying to obtain her husband's return to more regular habits of life; and it was with unfeigned and undisguised apprehension, mixed with sincere regret, that she saw him no sooner returned to Paris than plunged again into all the excesses of the Baroness's habitual society. Mildred, however, by the exceeding gentleness she had imposed upon herself as a duty, obtained certain concessions from Sir Edward that blinded the world to some portion at least, if not to the whole, of her domestic misery.

Thus, in some places of public or official resort, Lady Vernon and her husband were sometimes seen together, and not even Aurélie had (since her abortive attempt at Montmorency,) ventured to hint at any shadow upon Mildred's fair fame, which the world generally agreed in proclaiming spotless as snow. To those who knew her intimately, her conduct was

the subject of unceasing admiration, and for society at large she remained *la belle Lady Vernon*, with whom M. de Montévreux had once been supposed to be very near falling in love.

Sir Edward's passion for the Baroness increased with every hour, and neither his wife nor any living being, (except his man of business in England,) knew to what an extent his fortune was daily paying for this madness. From time to time, when he beheld Mildred the object of universal admiration, he could not avoid asking himself why he did not feel for her what he felt for Madame de Cévèzes, and, although he had read a very wise book, which had been unsuccessful in making him wiser, he did not see that it was because

> "She could not do these things, nor one or two
> Others, in that off-hand and dashing style
> *Which takes so much*,—to give the devil his due."

In a word, reader, Sir Edward had not yet discovered,—what I told you from the first, —that what he loved in Aurélie was her *viciousness*.

CHAPTER VI.

When Lady Vernon first avowed to herself her love for M. de Montévreux, she thought it was an easy thing to conquer. She was now forced to admit not only that it was very much the reverse, but that she was very unhappy at his absence. She soon, however, perceived that she had fallen into an unhealthy mood, and honestly she set about effecting her cure.

Mildred found but slight support in her husband; and all her efforts to act up to her own sense of duty, to be upon a level with her own moral standard of right, were made, unaided by any counsels save those of her upright and unwavering mind. She saw that society would

now be beneficial to her, and that, having nothing to fear from the contact of the world, she was authorized to seek in it *distraction*.

Lady Vernon became first amused, then interested, in observing the secret workings of the political machine, and in studying the merits and demerits of different parties; and she was not always in accordance with her best friends in the views she entertained upon them. For instance, on the following occasion she had nearly lost in Madame de Montévreux's eyes that favour she had never gained in those of the Princesse de la Roche Bermont. Both these ladies were together in the Duchess's boudoir one morning towards the end of January, when Lady Vernon was announced.

"And where were you last night, *chère belle*," asked Madame de Montévreux, "that you deserted Madame d'A—'s *prima sera?* I waited for you till past ten o'clock, and then, as I saw only two people remaining, I gave you up. Where *were* you?"

Lady Vernon smiled. "I should only make

you angry were I to tell you," replied she; "so I had best not say anything about it."

"I should rather suggest that to places where one cannot avow having been, one had best not go," observed the Princess, sourly.

"*Pardon*, Madame la Princesse," rejoined Mildred, "that is not my motive. I cannot but feel that a high honour has been conferred upon me, and if I did not at once announce it as such to Madame de Montévreux, it was out of tenderness to certain convictions, which, however little I participate in them, I do not think I have a right to offend; but since you put it upon that footing, I will openly say, that I was last night at the Château, where Sir Edward Vernon and myself had the honour of being received by the King and the Royal Family."

The Duchess looked astonished. Madame de la Roche Bermont literally measured Lady Vernon from head to foot. "And you call *that* an honour!" said she, with a supercilious impertinence impossible to imitate or describe.

"Certainly, I *do* call it an honour for a sub-

ject, every time that a sovereign receives him," answered Mildred, firmly.

The Duchess smiled. "Well," said she, "and who did you see at Court?"

"A vast number of *grandes dames*."

"Who told you *that*?" asked sharply the Princess.

"Why," replied Mildred, "you will not deny the importance of such names as Beauveau, Coigny, La Rochefoucauld, and others of a similar stamp? Besides, Madame de Séricourt, the Minister's wife, who was by my side, pointed out several others to me."

"As *des grandes dames?*" demanded the Princess, ironically. "Small authority!" continued she, shaking her head. "How should Madame de Séricourt know the difference between a *grande dame*, a *femme de qualité*, and a *femme de condition*, being barely the latter herself?"

"How can that be, *chère amie?*" asked the Duchess in her turn. "Surely Madame de Séricourt has a right to—"

"*Du tout!*" retorted her sister-in-law; "they are not the *good* Séricourts; the Séricourts of Orleans, of whom one accompanied St. Louis to the Holy Land. *Ceux-ci sont de mauvais Séricourts*—Séricourts of nothing at all. Their latest ancestor was a friend of la Pompadour, and had no name at all that I am aware of. However, he was very rich, and married a poor collateral descendant of the *real* Séricourts, and obtained permission to bear their name."

"Well then, at least, they are Séricourts in the female line," observed the Duchess.

"Not even that," answered the Princess. "The first Séricourt *de contrebande* had a grand-daughter, (it went no further), the present man's grandmother. She married a sort of *gentillâtre* from the neighbourhood of Lille—a Flamand; and, in her turn, obtained permission to transfer her maternal name to her husband. That is the way in which these people are Séricourts. So you see I am right in doubting whether one can even call Madame de Séricourt a *femme de condition*."

"I should say not," replied the Duchess, gravely: and the two ladies plunged deep into a learned discussion upon the rights and qualifications of *grandes dames*, *femmes de qualité*, and *femmes de condition*, precisely as though it were a question of obtaining for themselves, or disputing to another, some magnificently absurd privilege at the court of Louis XIV., or as if such distinctions were of the slightest consequence now-a-days.

Lady Vernon soon took her leave of the Duchess; and, as she drove up the long avenue of the Champs Elysées, she thought how much faster her horses' pace had seemed when they drew her through the scented woods of Montmorency, on the long summer evenings, with Gaston by her side.

CHAPTER VII.

Venice, February 22, 1844.

"I SEND you this letter, my dear Lady Vernon, by M. de S—, one of the *attachés* to our Embassy at Naples, who is travelling to Paris night and day with despatches; for I scarcely know whether, *à la rigueur*, I ought to write *openly* to you after what has occurred. But I am too happy to attend to etiquette, and sincerely hope you are also too much so to be offended by my putting it aside.

"Armand is quite well, and looking so as to astonish every one. He is perhaps rather thinner, and somewhat paler, but both become him *à ravir;* and yesterday a woman, to whose

stall I went to examine some goblets of old glass, of which he had spoken to me the day before, designated him to me, (not knowing him to be my husband), as '*questo bel e pallido Francese.*'

"We have now been here a week. We are established in a *palazzo* on the Canale Grande, and nothing can surpass our delight in visiting all the historic remains of this lovely, deserted place. I say *ours*, for, though Armand has been here before, and spent several months here, and knows every spot in every quarter, all seems to be no less new to him than to me.

"I have not yet told you what we did at Naples, nor how enchanted we were, nor how we enjoyed the climate, and the sea, and every thing. In truth, when I look back upon these last four months, which have flown by like four days, I am astonished at the little I have to tell. I suppose our life has been what is called monotonous, and that the only real event is that Armand is now quite well. Oh! but there is something more.

"We had quite an adventure on the road here from Rome. Just as we were,—I must leave off—I hear Armand calling me; I have left him for upwards of an hour, and he will be impatient if I keep him waiting any longer. Good bye, dear Lady Vernon. I wrote to Louise last night, and send the letter enclosed to you. *How is she?* You have read of the General's last victory over the Kabyles. What a glorious triumph! and to have escaped without a wound! But I *must* leave off, for I hear Armand coming to my room to fetch me. Adieu!

"Yours affectionately,

"MONTEVREUX DE MORETON."

The few last lines were written in such an evident hurry, that Lady Vernon could hardly decypher them.

And this was the letter she received one morning from the Viscountess. Happy Clémentine! Beloved now in her turn by him she best loved upon earth. She, *his wife*, to whose ardent legitimate affection opinion placed

no boundary, no limit, was wandering with him, surrounded by all the golden dreams of pure and permitted love, in that sunny fairy-land where poetry and passion have their birth.

Mildred was half inclined to repine at her own lot, and as the record of her friend's happiness lay before her, to ask why she had been deprived of the more precious portion of Heaven's fair gifts. "His wife!" she could not avoid murmuring; "and, alas! why am I not Gaston's?" rose involuntarily to her lips.

During the whole of this day the Viscountess's letter haunted Mildred, and tortured still further her already aching heart. Honest, courageous and strong as she was, she was very near despairing, and giving herself up to the gloomy conviction that every thing in this world came either too soon or too late; before its proper time had arrived, or after it had flown.

She compared in her own mind the destinies of Madame de Moreton and Madame de Boislambert; and if, in her despondency, her virtue had needed any support, it would have found it

in the picture of the unfortunate Marchioness; for whilst, on the one hand, she saw and envied the happy wife, in whose footsteps she *could* not follow; she saw on the other, the erring one whose example she *would* not imitate. Tired, disheartened, and clinging to her sense of duty with desperation, Lady Vernon drove out that night to a *soirée* at Madame de Séricourt's, the Minister's wife.

This was a house which, although an official one, might, for many reasons, be considered as neutral ground. M. de Séricourt was essentially one of those persons who possess what Boileau termed the "difficult art of transitions:" the delicate science of devoting themselves to every newly-established power, without appearing to desert the one which has just fallen. He inherited this from his father, who had corresponded with the *émigrés* whilst employed by Robespierre; remained friends with the old *noblesse* whilst holding office under Napoleon; and died during the Restoration, in the full enjoyment of the confidence of the defeated

Imperialists, and of twenty thousand francs a year from a place given him by Louis XVIII.

His son, observing the same line of conduct, had contrived to keep up certain connections in the Faubourg St. Germain, whilst he was, nevertheless, in 1830, one of the first to offer his services to the Government of July. His wife, too, assisted him not a little in this undertaking; for besides being herself of an incontestably good family, she possessed an acknowledged and undisputed influence over one of the very bitterest and most powerful enemies of the existing order of things—over M. le Duc de Lunéville. Yes! even as we have seen him, powder, pomatum, cross of St. Louis, and all.

There was a double advantage in this *liaison;* for, whilst it at least established a communication with (if it did not control) the more refractory of the enemy's camp, it gave scarcely any opportunity for scandal, inasmuch as the Duc de Lunéville would as soon have gone to Court as to any of Madame de Séricourt's public receptions.

The captivating Ministress had the advantage of not being any thing remarkable; neither too silly nor too clever; neither too ignorant nor too learned; neither too active nor too inert; neither too free-thinking nor too *dévote*. In short, *too* nothing—a very model of mediocrity, and of a Minister's wife. She invariably had the good sense to take her husband's part against her lover, and upon all occasions to pronounce the latter in the wrong; which was probably the reason he continued to entertain for her such constant sentiments of adoration, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his own party.

If Madame de Séricourt was a paragon of Ministresses, M. de Séricourt was a pattern for Ministers; and eke a *useful* man (which all pattern Ministers are not). He was not devoted to any thing or any system, but, like a wise man, carefully felt the pulse of public opinion every day, and never prescribed any thing the patient did not like. It was not exactly that M. de Séricourt's positive labours in his official

capacity were so particularly beneficial to his country, but it was the very fact of his existence in office that made him capable of rendering such immense services.

"*C'est un Ministre de luxe,*" said one day a Deputy of the *opposition de Gauche.*

"*Oui, mais rappelez-vous bien,*" replied the lady to whom he spoke, "*que le nécessaire aujourd'hui c'est le superflu.*"

At M. de Séricourt's receptions, all Paris was to be met, except, indeed, that portion of the Ultra-Carlist party, who live in the retirement of their own houses and their own ideas. We believe we have already said it, the *boudeurs* are divided into two distinct classes—*le Faubourg St. Germain qui sort,* and *le Faubourg St. Germain qui ne sort pas.*

The former are enchanted to dance, sup, talk, and be amused at every one's expense, and at every one's house, but their own.—(Hence the inconceivable success of certain Americans, Russians, and other social Charlatans who have consented to keep open house for them). The

latter live in the noble, dignified seclusion of their historic homes; and if they do not open their doors to strangers, they are at least never to be found in the giddy crowd that courts pleasure at every turn.

Of these two classes, the former alone frequented the *salons* of Madame de Séricourt, but this gave to her receptions a colour of elegance and fashion, which made her an object of envy to the wives of most of her husband's colleagues. Unmarried men, belonging to all parties (even to the quintessence of the exclusive few above mentioned), were amongst her habitual guests; and, although the acquaintance of Madame de la Roche Bermont and Madame de Montévreux could not be aspired to by Madame de Séricourt, Gaston was not rarely one of her visitors. Her *salon*, on the whole, was exceedingly agreeable, and one of those where Mildred found the greatest sum of distraction.

Upon the night in question there was an unusual affluence at the Minister's hotel. Skirmishes were daily taking place in the chambers, and the Conservatives thought it their duty to rally round their leaders upon every occasion. "Pritchard" and "Concessions to England," were the war-cries adopted by the Opposition to ruin M. Guizot in public opinion, and dislocate, if not overthrow, the Ministry.

Against the Minister for Foreign Affairs were principally directed the efforts of their rage; and let national prejudices, or individual opinions be what they will upon M. Guizot's character or political career, never was there a more curious spectacle given to an impartial eye, than the struggle between the chief of the *Doctrinaires* on one side (for the entire weight of the whole rested upon his shoulders), and the loud host of his clamorous assailants on the other.

As Lady Vernon entered Madame de Séri-

court's *salon*, she perceived that the tide of political discussion ran high. Even amongst those who more habitually occupied themselves with literature and the arts, politics and the recent occurrences in the Chambers took the lead before every other question.

Some few there were who found time to speak of the two great literary events of the day, — the reception of M. de Saint Marc Girardin, and M. Sainte-Beuve, by Victor Hugo at the Académie Française; but the generality were exclusively employed in discussing the conduct of the Ministry in retaining office, and the probable accession of strength brought to the government party, by the substitution of M. de Salvandy for M. Villemain, as Minister of Public Instruction.

As soon as Mildred had gone through the necessary ceremony of her reception by the lady of the house, she took the arm of a friend whom she had agreed to meet, and moved

towards a less conspicuous part of the room.

The two ladies found no two vacant seats, save an unsocial *méridienne* close to a door-way. Upon this Lady Vernon seated herself, whilst her friend joined a group of ladies, formed in the centre of the room.

The little group gradually dispersed, and a few stragglers only remained. It was getting late. Mildred was alone when she *felt* a step behind her, and heard a voice that made her drop her fan!

English women are *not* naturally consummate actresses, and are deplorably apt to show all that passes within them.

"*Bon soir*, Lady Vernon," were the only words pronounced; but Mildred could not answer. She picked up her fan, but the seat on which she sat was so placed, slantingly across a doorway, and opposite a glass, that, on raising her head, she caught in the mirror the reflection of Gaston de Montévreux's eyes

bent upon hers. A moment after, he was by her side upon the sulky-looking *méridienne* I have described.

How Mildred's heart beat, and how proudly happy Gaston looked! Both talked hurriedly; both were agitated; but the glances which M. de Montévreux could not avert from Mildred, who never more looked at him, plainly showed that his whole soul was overflowing with tenderness and joy, at having recovered that he had parted with so long. He had arrived in Paris that afternoon, after having lost his *procès*, and had learned, on calling at Lady Vernon's, where his first evening visit was paid, that she had left, half an hour before, to attend Madame de Séricourt's reception.

Mildred took the first opportunity of rising to seek her friend, and, telling her she felt indisposed and should stay no longer, she escaped alone into the ante-room, and saw her equipage promptly drive up to the *perron*. As the carriage door closed upon Lady Vernon, she

struggled no longer against her grief: throwing herself into a corner of the *coupé*, and burying her face in her handkerchief, she gave way to an agony of tears. The less she doubted the urgency of the sacrifice, the more she wept over all she was about to lose.

Oh! why had Gaston returned? Above all, why had he surprised her into such sudden, irrepressible joy, only to be swept away by such overwhelming sorrow?

When Lady Vernon descended from her carriage at her own door, the marks of tears were effaced from her pale face, and the determination to do what was right surmounted every other idea in her mind. One thing was at all costs to be prevented: it was the possibility of again meeting M. de Montévreux. Mildred felt that another interview could not pass without his saying that which she must not hear. On entering the vestibule,—

"Wilson," said she, "you will order the travelling-carriage to be got in readiness to-morrow, and see that the imperials are brought

down and given to Brookes; and," taking one or two steps up the stairs, and then turning round,—"Tell the *concierge* that to-morrow I am at home to *no one!*"

"I forgot," answered the man, "to tell your Ladyship that M. le Duc de Montévreux called this evening. If he should call again to morrow?"

"I shall be denied to him as to every one else," reiterated Mildred, turning to mount the stairs.

When in her room, Lady Vernon, instead of proceeding to undress, dismissed her maid for the moment, desiring she might be informed the instant that Sir Edward should return. Towards two o'clock the sound of wheels caught her ear, and she was told her husband had just entered the house. Throwing a shawl over her, Mildred, still in her gay attire, went straight to Sir Edward's dressing-room. A voice said sharply "*come in*," as she knocked at the door, and, thus authorized, entered.

A hat and a torn glove were lying on the

floor; a cloak was thrown across the table. Sir Edward himself was stretched in an arm-chair before the fire, with his two feet resting on the dogs. He did not rise or move, and Lady Vernon was struck by the wretched expression of his countenance. He was deadly pale, except for two red spots upon his cheek-bones, near the eyes; every feature was drawn, and his whole face was most completely what the French term *bouleversé*. Mildred advanced into the room and leant upon the chimney-piece. He did not raise his eyes towards her nor speak.

"I wish to go to England," said she, in a low, firm tone, and without further preamble.

"Then why don't you go?" replied he with an unhealthy apathy, that qualified the rudeness of the speech.

"I wish to start immediately—the day after to-morrow," pursued Mildred.

"And what should hinder you?" demanded he, without asking the reason of this sudden departure.

"I wished first, to know whether you had any objection . . . ." suggested his wife gently.

"Objection!" echoed Sir Edward impatiently, "what objection can I have? Are you not at liberty? Is not every one at liberty to come and go where they like?—to *go* particularly," added he bitterly, and with rising animation. "What is it to me? What do I care? And if I *did* care, who would mind that? No: go!—Go, and be ——".

The last fearful word was lost in the sound of the blow Sir Edward gave with his boot upon the brass *chenet*.

Lady Vernon looked sadly and compassionately at her husband, and, in her softest tones said, as she held out her hand, "It may be very long before we meet again. Farewell, Edward! I pity you from the bottom of my soul."

Sir Edward cast a half scared glance at her, and then, seizing both her hands—"Indeed, Mildred, I believe you do," exclaimed he with energy, though in an altered and broken voice;

"God bless you for it! You are an angel! But you do not know,"—and he threw her hands from him, and struck his clenched fist upon the table,—"you do not know what a miserable wretch I am!"

"We have all our miseries in this world," said Mildred impressively; "and we can only pray to Heaven to lighten our load, and to keep us at least from sin."

Oh! d—n it, don't preach!" ejaculated her husband, in an almost furious tone.

Mildred left the room; but, as she closed the door, she saw that her husband had sunk back in the arm-chair and had covered his face with his hands.

That evening, whilst returning home, after having lost twelve thousand pounds at play, Sir Edward's brougham was impeded in its passage close by M. Chavigny's hotel in the Rue Taitbout. A *citadine* was stationed at the door, and, as the *porte-cochère* of the house opened, a female figure stepped out of the hackney-coach, dropped something into the coachman's

hand, and instantaneously disappeared into the interior of Chavigny's abode. All this, however, did not pass so rapidly but that Sir Edward could recognise, by the light of the street lamp, in the lady who turned to pay the *cocher de fiacre*, she, for whom he had renounced everything—Madame de Cévèzes—Aurélie!

The day but one after Gaston's return to Paris, Lady Vernon was on the road to Boulogne, leaving an affectionate letter for Madame de Montevréux, regretting that the pressing nature of the business which called her to England should be such as to have deprived her of the pleasure of bidding adieu in person to her kindest and best friends.

CHAPTER VIII.

Seven months had elapsed, and during all that time Mildred had inhabited the Larches, with her aunt and her cousin, Philip Egerton. A very scanty number of visitors had come, during the summer, to interrupt their solitude, on account of Mrs. Egerton's weak health; and even September and the first days of October had brought with them but few stragglers, for the work of grouse and black-game shooting. This kind of seclusion suited Lady Vernon's present mood far better than any gaieties could have done, and she was perhaps as near to a state of negative happiness as, under existing circumstances, she could be. I will not pretend

that she had forgotten M. de Montévreux, or his love for her. No! she had not even forgotten hers for him. There, in her heart, burned the flame, strong, bright, but *pure* as ever. Hers was no sickly sentiment; instead of weakening, it strengthened her; instead of demoralizing, it upheld her for all high and noble purposes.

Mildred did not return with indifference to the scenes of her childhood—to the home of her early youth. She had grown to love the country, and she would now spend hours, and almost days, on the hills and in the pine-woods, in lone communion with her anxious thoughts. On the banks of the rushing Lowther, and on the fair, grassy holms that border the Eden and the Eamont, would she dream away half her time, and meditate sometimes (though, to do her justice, rarely) upon that which might not be. These were Mildred's moments of recreation; for, although Gaston's image followed her everywhere, and that she cherished the recollection of him perhaps too fondly—still, she never

allowed this to interfere with her more active duties; and, during her whole sojourn at the Larches, she was to Mrs. Egerton the most attentive of daughters and the most patient of friends.

No one in the north knew the exact position of Sir Edward's affairs, nor of his discussions with his wife. Had Mrs. Egerton not been in an infirm state of health, she would probably have obtained some clue to the whole, and would have wondered why he did not write, why Mildred staid away so long, what he could be doing in Paris alone—with all the other wonderments good-natured people give way to on such occasions; but, as things were, she only wondered why *she* did not get better, and what was the matter with *her*. Philip Egerton, perhaps, saw a little clearer into affairs; but he had a sincere regard for his cousin, and contrived, whenever his mother did throw out anything in the shape of a hint, to turn it off adroitly, and set her mind at perfect ease.

Philip was one of the most delightful and one

of the best men in the world. He was one of those bachelors of forty odd, such as you meet with no where but in England, and who differ from the *hommes de quarante ans*. of our neighbours as light does from dark. The latter are perhaps the very worst and the most dangerous portion of the male species in France, and form a *bande à part*, whose peculiar province it seems to be, to become the first lovers of young married women of eighteen.

Our middle-aged bachelors, on the contrary, with some very few exceptions, seem to forget that conceit or *prétensions* ever existed, and are generally speaking, the most amiable, the most obliging, and the most unaffected beings upon earth.

Philip Egerton was all this. He had been very handsome; but, if he ever knew it, remembered it no longer: he had always, as a boy, possessed the sweetest temper imaginable; and maturity and a profound knowledge of the world, had only increased his equanimity. For Philip *had* a profound knowledge of the

world, and of mankind, gained in habits of early frequentation of the society of his own country, and a rather long residence in most of the continental capitals.

It would have been almost impossible for Mildred to have found a more agreeable home than at her cousin's, for Mrs. Egerton, although rendered somewhat selfish by ill-health, had many delightful qualities, and an unusual absence of stiffness, or *parade*-propriety. She never *played* decorum, nor thought it necessary to appear shocked at what was not really shocking, and was as free from affectation as her son.

One day, on Lady Vernon's return from her drive, she was met by her cousin.

"Well, Mildred," said he, "I do not mean to say that we are menaced with a visit from Old Nick, or from what the Commodore (one of the few visitors at the Larches,) calls a 'she-devil,' but here is an old friend of yours arrived, it appears, —read that;" and he put into her hand a letter from Sir Edward, received while she was absent.

This epistle was dated the 17th of May,

and purported to introduce to Mrs. Egerton and her son, an intimate friend of Sir Edward and Lady Vernon—a French nobleman, to whose illustrious and amiable family they both were indebted for the most constant and hospitable kindness, and to whom, should he visit the north, (as if there were any doubt of that!) Sir Edward begged Philip would show all imaginable attention. The Duc de Montévreux's card accompanied the note.

"And what do you mean to do?" asked Mildred, tranquilly.

"Do!" echoed her cousin, "why, what *could* I do but what I have done?—send John Blake off to Penrith in the dog-cart, with a note, requesting your friend to come over here directly, and to bring as much luggage and as many servants as he chooses, and to stay here as long as he likes. Have I not done right?" added he, surprised at Mildred's silence.

"Perfectly," replied she, as she proceeded to her room.

CHAPTER IX.

I WILL not attempt to describe Lady Vernon's agitation upon receiving the news of Gaston's arrival at the Larches. It was so sudden; she was so unprepared; it seemed so like a fatality! And what was she to do? If Gaston had not known of her presence at her cousin's, (she had purposely written to no one since her departure, not even to Madame de Moreton or Madame de Boislambert,) she might have hoped, by perseveringly cold and distant behaviour to him, to induce him to feel that his presence was not desired by her. But, even supposing this conduct towards a foreigner, in the house of her nearest relative, not to have been contrary to every law of hospitality, how

could she imagine that it would produce any effect? How could she dream that M. de Montévreux should be ignorant of her present place of abode, or think that he came with any other view than merely to endanger her peace?

Although Mildred was less alarmed at the possible consequences of her own feelings, since she had learned to examine and study them, still she was now disheartened at the small assistance Providence seemed inclined to afford her in this, her dutiful and loyal struggle for the right. In the uncontrollable emotion which took possession of her during the first half hour after the sudden announcement of Gaston's visit, there was much more, infinitely more, of real disquietude and regret, than of that uneasy, fluttering joy which usually agitates the best-trained, best-regulated heart, at the near approach of the one beloved.

It was in this state of annoyance and fear that Lady Vernon met the Duke in the library, a few moments after the dinner-bell had

summoned the guests to table. But before half the repast was over, Mildred began to feel considerably reassured. In the first place, M. de Montévreux's manner at meeting her was so perfectly unconstrained, so natural, so much more free from the most imperceptible agitation, than even her own, that she grew calmer and less alarmed with every moment.

When, after dinner, the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room, M. de Montévreux, without any affectation, seated himself near to Mrs. Egerton's arm-chair, and opposite to Mildred, and, with the respectful ease of a well-bred man, talked in English (which he had contrived to learn in perfection) to the latter, of her Paris acquaintances, and drew her aunt naturally into listening to, and even taking an interest in the conversation. The rest of the party soon grouped themselves round these three, and the conversation became general. When they broke up for the night, every one was loud in praises of the handsome stranger, and even Captain Barrington, whom we have heard Philip

style 'the Commodore,' admitted him to be the most gentleman-like Frenchman he had ever seen. Mildred felt a heavy load taken from her breast, and her slumbers that night were comparatively tranquil.

But what comforted her in the commencement was in a very short space of time (such is the miserable weakness of human nature) a source of restlessness, if not of pain. Gaston's behaviour to her had not altered in the slightest degree since the first moment they met. One would have thought the past was not—had never been. But, then, why was Gaston there? This question, which she had forgotten to ask either herself or him a year before, when he surprised her singing one evening at her château at Montmorency, she now asked of herself, daily, almost hourly. Why? To seek comfort therein; to be persuaded that he had not forgotten her. Poor Mildred! She could not yet rejoice at the idea of Gaston's having ceased to love her.

M. de Montévreux, in his behaviour however, showed no desire to *pique* Lady Vernon.

He never paid attention to any of the ladies who might chance to come to the Larches, (and some there were, from neighbouring halls and castles, young and very handsome too); but his tone to her was ever the same, respectful, polished, kind, familiar even as that of an old friend; but *never embarrassed.* She no longer feared to be alone with him. She had done so the first time it had happened; but he quickly restored calmness and self-possession to her by his manner, by the subjects he conversed upon, and by the tone of his voice. Mildred felt that hers trembled; his did not.

Day after day passed by, and Gaston had but once spoken of going northwards to visit Scotland; and then, such an outcry was raised, such petitions were addressed to him (by every one, save Mildred), that he had given up his plan, and did not seem inclined to resume it. M. de Montévreux appeared to enter perfectly into all the amusements and occupations of an English country house, and to adapt himself completely to habits so different from those of

his own native land. But Gaston was so changed in regard to opinions and views of things generally (particularly in all connected with politics) that Lady Vernon scarcely recognised in him the man she had once known, and could not always refrain from expressing to him as much.

M. de Montévreux had come to England in the month of May, and had, after weathering the storm of a London season, devoted the months of August and September entirely to studying, over the face of the country generally, the causes of those political and social effects, to which, in England, he could not avoid offering such a sincere tribute of admiration.

To enable you, reader, to form a more just idea of the impression our dear country must inevitably make upon the mind of an enlightened French *gentleman*, in Gaston's position, we will give you a slight sketch of certain particular tendencies (rather than facts) which have, in France, given rise necessarily to certain events, and forced certain persons into the situations they now fill.

That which strikes you the most forcibly after a long residence in France, is the radical antagonism of two distinct classes:—the Noblesse and the Bourgeoisie. Will there ever be a fusion between the two? "That is," indeed, "the question," and a very important question it is. Will the nobles ever condescend to *work?* Will the *bourgeois* ever be fit to constitute an aristocracy? At present, you are equally shocked by the systematically-ignorant uselessness of the high-born, and by the ungentlemanly bearing and vulgarity of sentiment of the practical.

I do not mean here to deny some brilliant exceptions to the rule. I speak generally. There are, in every country monarchically governed, whatever may be the peculiar form of its government, three orders of beings upon whom the harmony of the nation depends:—the sovereign race, appointed to wield sovereign sway; the oligarchical portion of the community, the upper classes—call them aristocracy, nobility, peerage, what you will; those, in short, who concentrate, amongst a comparatively small number, the greatest share of privileges and the

greatest portion of power; and the people—the mass, the crowd, the unknown-governed. According to what shall be in each several country the degree of rule accorded to either of these separate powers, so will the particular tendency of government manifest itself in that country; and, according as these powers shall have been educated and trained, so will their rule be felt, submitted to, or contested.

Now, what has been the political education, in France, of the princes, the nobility, and the people? I do not yet speak of the *middle* class, because they are *not* an indigenous plant in any political soil, and only grow gradually out of circumstances produced chiefly by the faults of the upper and the wrongs of the lower classes. This mixed race is less *natural* to the habits and traditions of France than to those of any other country on the globe; and yet their influence has, during the last thirty or forty years, ended by outweighing every other in the social scale. But I repeat, what has been the political education of the princes, the nobility,

and the people? The monarchs of France, brought up from infancy with those whose strongest interest it was to keep them in darkness, have never, since Louis XIV., discovered that their intimate friends were their natural foes. Louis XIV. knew it, and lost no occasion, during his long life, of humiliating the arrogance of his courtiers. He was—like many other autocrats—far more liberal, as it is called, than any of those who succeeded him in more enlightened times. He presented, in many respects, and in all occurrences of private life especially, a monstrous combination of selfishness and most of the meaner vices; but in his public career, he possessed the clearest conception of the necessity, for the sake of the influence of the Crown, of *counter-action* against that of the Court; and upon this system of counteraction he was perpetually employed.

With a monarch who *governs* as well as *reigns*,* what is called the *Court*-party, is not

* The expression, *Le roi règne et ne gouverne pas*, was one of the first which identified itself, in 1827, with M. Thiers.

always the *King's*. So it was with Louis XIV. who *did* govern, and defeated his Court; so it was *not* with Charles X., who could not govern, and who, from wanting to do so, adopted all the absurd ideas of the party for whom he lost his crown. Louis XIV. knew it was his interest to give the highest consecration to merit; it both attached to him individual capacities, and at the same time humbled the pride of those who supported the principle of all social honours and distinctions belonging by *right* to the nobly born.

The Crown, omnipotent with Louis XIV., lost its influence during the Regency, and fell, with Louis XV., under the rule of the first fair denizen of the Parc aux Cerfs. Louis XVI., it is true, came to the throne with a most moral abhorrence of his predecessor's vices, but with his eyes not one bit more opened to the real position of affairs and parties. He saw his enemies where they were not, and did not see them where they were. The new class,

the *bourgeoisie*, was already springing up, and to this class, in scarce more than a quarter of a century to be the masters of all others, Louis XVI. thought he made a sufficient concession in recalling (ungraciously, and being forced to do so) Necker to the helm of the State. Before coming to a struggle with the *bourgeois*, the Crown came to a struggle with the people, and herein it was defeated.

But where were they who were to succeed? Where were the heirs to this fatal inheritance? So much folly and so much crime, had they no lesson to give *them?* *They* were away, accepting the hospitality of other countries, and occupied in stopping their ears to the most distant echoes of the fearful storm that raged in their own land. *There* lay the fault. I do not mean to say that Monsieur and the Comte d'Artois were not justified in seeking a refuge far from that falling throne, which they could not help to uphold, and whose fall would have crushed them: but, even if absent in the body, they

should have been present in the spirit: and it was this complete detachment from every passing event, this haughty disdain for facts, this culpable and wilful ignorance of the changed state of the country they were both, later called upon, to govern, which mainly incapacitated them for the duties of their station. Whilst they were following this senseless course, another of their race was employing all the resources of his intelligence in the comprehension of what had already passed, and what was yet passing around.

From that hour—from the period of the emigration—the fate of both branches was sealed. It might be delayed, but it could not be averted. The total unfitness of the elder branch was pronounced. Those who had, according to M. de Talleyrand's expression, "forgotten nothing, and learnt as little," were condemned by the great law of nature to make way for those who, having had every opportunity of profiting by the counsels of experience

seemed best qualified to regulate the new order of things in a renovated country. This it was which made the Orleans' dynasty a momentary necessity for France.

But whilst the monarchs of Gaul were thus incapacitating themselves for the further exercise of supreme power, what was the *noblesse* about? The *grands seigneurs*, after having, under Louis XIV., yielded active assistance to the State; after having distinguished themselves in the Ministry and in the highest branches of the administration, by serious application to serious subjects, became, under the Regent and his successor, gradually unfit for the assumption of the heavy responsibility of public affairs. The love of pleasure replaced the love of graver pursuits, and, in habits of dissipation, all more business-like habits disappeared. The *noblesse* of France grew to be unpractical. They were still ready to fight as much as any one chose, and apt for the "tented field;" for a braver, a more chivalrous,

or a more thoroughly gentlemanlike set of men never put foot in stirrup, or hand on sword; but as an intelligent body, as a moral force, they were extinct, and could give no aid to the sinking throne.

They, too, even in the thick of the Revolution, went from illusion to illusion, and the unhappy Sovereign and his fair Austrian Queen were not more blind to the consequences of each misguided step, than were those who were then called their *faithful* friends of the Court. The *noblesse*, like their Princes, in very considerable numbers, deserted the post of danger in the hour of need; and like them, they also resolved not to accept the principle of *les faits accomplis*. The Revolution, in their eyes, did not exist; they overlooked it in their calculations, and acted as though it had never been. They treated it with disdain, took no account of it, and drew a line of eternal separation between it and themselves, without condescending to examine the principles it had put forth, or the personages it had engendered. The Empire,

indeed, they looked upon in a very different light, whatever they might affect to say later, in order to pay better court to the Restoration; and their highest names and titles were to be found swelling the train of the Kings and Queens who crowded the stage of Napoleon's Court.

Their incentive was, they said, that the Emperor had given glory to their country; but the truth would have been more nearly approached were one to say that he had given food to their vanity. Under his iron hand they did not dare rebel (for I cannot term the Vendéan insurrections any thing but provincial *émeutes* on a large scale), and much less did they dare aspire to anything in the shape of rule. But with the Restoration began their political misfortunes, for then they aspired to, and too often obtained, power. The first months, the first days of Louis XVIII's reign were given to glutting the pride and vanity of the *noblesse*. All that should have been remembered was forgotten; the crown, torn by an

infuriated mob from the head of a murdered King; that same crown restored to his successor on the point of foreign swords; an invasion, chasing from the throne of Charlemagne a usurper, whose glory all France had for fifteen years adored;—the sense of these awful lessons was lost upon those who, entering a country forcibly *given* back to them by strangers, chose to lie themselves into the monstrous belief of dreaming they were *recalled!*

However, had the elder Bourbons chosen to win by their own merits the reality of a position, the mere semblance of which had been conferred on them by the invasion of 1815, they had the power of so doing in their own hands. It can never be the lot of Louis Philippe to dispose of the governing elements which belonged to the two Monarchs of the Restoration. They might, had they been so minded, have established, with comparative ease, the representative form of Government in all its sincerity; whereas, to Louis Philippe, the consecrating power, so necessary to the Crown in a limited Monarchy, must be always more or less wanting. But

the elder Bourbons, like the noblesse, forgot that they no longer held their privileges by Divine right.

The nation had acquired, by the great fact of the Revolution, the right of choosing for itself; and it *had not* chosen the Bourbons of the elder branch. Hence, the constant struggle between the Crown, which now, unfortunately, was forced to lean upon the *noblesse*, and the nation, represented by the Chamber of Deputies. When the Crown was again defeated, the *noblesse* was so too, and its members (with few exceptions) retired from the scene in disdainful dudgeon.

And yet, if the present order of things is to last in France, this very class *must* rally round it. Louis Philippe not having thought proper to look for support to the democratic principle which placed him on the throne, not having won the confidence of the *people*, must draw towards him the aristocracy, or perish by the encroachments of the *bourgeoisie*, against which he has no resistance to oppose. Much harm is inevitable if the *noblesse* of France does not one day put aside its discontent, and consent

to form that indispensable part of a constitutional government—an aristocracy—a powerful, patriotic, *laborious* aristocracy.

But, had the Duc de Bordeaux succeeded to the throne in 1830, would the situation of the *noblesse* have been improved? No! For they would then have tried again to mislead him as they had misled his grandfather, and the Revolution of July would but have been postponed. But would they be better off were he to succeed now? Still worse! for he must, in such a case, give solemn and incontestable pledges of having broken for ever with them and theirs.

The last chance of the *noblesse* lies with the Orleans' dynasty. Should the establishment of a constitutional monarchy under Louis Philippe prove abortive, an order of things may be inaugurated that will leave small room for any privileges save those gained by talent and capacity. By conceding much at the present moment, much may be saved hereafter; but if the higher orders in France will not consent to *labour* now (and to labour for the good of *all* classes), it may, ere long, be too late.

And the people? What has become of the people during all this period? That which generally becomes of them in all such circumstances. They have been in every one's mouth, and in no one's heart. They have been talked about and written about, but have they been relieved? They also have undergone their political education, and, at least, they now *exist*, which they did not until the three days of 1830. What is wanting to them now is, to have, if not greater confidence in their rulers, at least greater diffidence in themselves.

Politically born in the Revolution, the people of France should now have had pretty nearly time to sow the worst of their wild oats, and give some tokens of having at length attained to the ripe development of sober maturity. It is evident that to them the advent to the throne of the House of Orleans has given a sanction nothing can destroy. Let them talk as they will, of individual disappointments and visionary hopes undone—history will eternally blazon forth *one fact*,—that the greatest nations of the earth and the most aristocratical, have accepted, treated with, and allied themselves to, the sove-

reign whose sceptre has been placed in his hand by the unanimous consent, and by the sole decree, of the heroes of the barricades of July, of the mass of the people of France.

Here, nevertheless, is the danger—here the misunderstanding that may end in grave disasters. The sovereign, instead of taking pride in his origin, disclaims it; and, whilst his only real force lies in the attachment of the *people* who chose him, he has recourse to woman's fictions, of which the application is, in his case, as absurd as it is impossible. Louis Philippe is, either the elect of the nation, or the worst of usurpers. Yet he does not perceive this, and, in his neglect of the people, blinds himself to the fact of the popular mass becoming towards him what the offended *bourgeoisie* was to the elder branch. The middle classes have at this hour rendered themselves as obnoxious to the nation as the *Chambre introuvable* made itself to them; and M. Duchâtel exercises, perhaps, a no less pernicious influence over the Head of the House of Orleans, than did M. de Polignac over Charles X.

The personal energy of Louis Philippe has

failed to contend with this mischievous class. The first founder of this race is Fouquet: he personifies it in all its sharp, money-getting intelligence, its consciousness of its own importance, its offensive vulgarity and ostentatious parvenuism. Louis XIV. instinctively guessed the evil, and annihilated it. Had the unfortunate Superintendent been a man like Colbert, wholly dependant on the crown for his elevation, the lover of Louise de la Vallière would have forgotten that a subject had dared to be his rival; but Fouquet's was a new position—a position *à part*—and one of which the continuance was insupportable to royalty.

In the Regency, and under Louis XV., Fouquet again reappears under many different forms,—Law, and Samuel Bernard, to go no further;—and now he is courted, instead of being sent to Pignerol. But, as yet, the *bourgeois* has confined himself to finance,—he is a banker, a schemer, a money-lender, an usurer if you will,—one to whom great men bow, but, after all, a sort of Christian Jew. Soon he will change his part, and meddle with the affairs of state; and then, instead of borrowing money from him

and perhaps marrying his daughter to regild your tarnished coronets, nobles of the "fairest kingdom after that of heaven,"* you will have to observe laws which he shall have made, and which trench on your fortunes and attack your immunities—for now, the Fouquet of Louis XIV., the *financier*, the banker, has become a Minister of State, and his name Necker. Now begins the reign of that race of men whom you do not know; of those sable-vested commoners, the deputies of the *Tiers-Etat*, for whom you cannot even devise a dress, and to whom you would fain deny the honour of deliberating by your side in the first meeting of the States-General.

From this hour the existence of the *bourgeoisie* was secured; and this was another of those incontrovertible facts, which the nobility of France sought to exclude from its mental eye. The *bourgeoisie* began by guiding the revolution, but anarchy soon spread over the

* The words of one of the Queens of Spain to her daughter, affianced to a King of France.

whole social surface, and the populace defeated those who attempted to be their chiefs.

During the glorious dictature which quelled the insane spirit of the mass, and allowed the overplus of energy and force to expend itself in external warfare instead of in internal strife, the development of the *bourgeoisie* came to a dead halt. The people were here again paramount, but they had become disciplined by passing into the ranks, and the entire nation was transformed into one immense regiment. It would have been contrary to Napoleon's principle of government, to his very cause of being, to have conciliated this middle class, the necessity of which, if he foresaw, he could only dread; and accordingly, for having disdained that class, he fell.

What followed is curious enough, and only affords another example of the truth—that no one can resist the spirit of the age. The Emperor, while promoting the cultivation of the sciences, was not aware that he was also helping to pave the way for another order of things. Science, in modern times, is no longer worshipped

for its own sake, but for the sake of the practical uses to which it may be adapted; and when you have discovered the application of steam, it is hard to prevent what Bonaparte termed "shop-keepers" from reflecting upon the great facilities afforded by steam navigation to commerce.

But how, if you *have* no commerce, or comparatively none? If all your great fortunes belong only to military illustrations, or to the old lords of the soil? Why, then, there is a whole class which, in every modern nation, must be an important one, whose interests are opposed to yours, and whose every wish is associated with your defeat. So it was with the Empire. During the last years of Napoleon's reign, commerce was but a nominal thing. Commercial towns and ports were ruined, and the customs yielded about a sixth portion of what they have yielded since. In the days of his prosperity even, Napoleon never felt but the most entire contempt for all that was connected with bank transactions, exchange, trade, and industry of every kind. Naturally

enough, the day he fell, commerce, which under his government had been the most neglected part, became, under that of the Bourbons, the one most attended to.

One of the worst consequences to a country of these violent changes of rulers is, the sudden upward impetus they give to one particular party or class: just exactly that one that has, under the last system, suffered the most. Hence the unavoidable importance given, in the present, to commerce by the *Restauration*, and hence, in the future, unless some speedy check be opposed to it, the inevitable preponderance of the *bourgeoisie!* The Bourbons who found the five per cents' stock at 43 francs, left it at 114 francs; and Heaven only knows how many fortunes were then made, which enabled their possessors to make head against the Crown!

"Set a beggar on horseback" is a wise old saying; but never was its truth exemplified so completely as in the case of the French *bourgeoisie;* they have not yet quite ridden to the devil themselves, but they soon drove the Crown there. And here is clearly manifested one of the

fatalities of the *Restauration.* The government of the elder Bourbons began by doing everything that was possible to raise commerce and industry, and thereby improve the situation of the middle classes; but it did not flatter their vanity ; and, what is worse, it *could* not do so. Surrounded as the Court was, by all the arrogant old *noblesse*, more arrogant than it had ever been before, it could not help humiliating what was called *la haute Finance*, (it humiliated even the military glories of the Empire !) and its very advances could at best but pass for *condescension.*

Thus it was that, while the Restoration created the *bourgeoisie*, gave it life, money, power, it but shaped for itself its bitterest enemy. Louis XVIII. felt this ; and, worthy successor of Henri IV. as he was, he tried by every means to conciliate all ranks, and continue to steer clear of all too open struggles. But, after his death, it became evident, to all who could see, that the time for temporizing was past, and that, with the Court and Ministry constituted as it was, the combat could not long be delayed.

Charles X. did not even wish to flatter the *bourgeoisie;* he would have deemed it unworthy of his position to attempt to do so; and, in the face of the trembling Martignac ministry, he did not hesitate to adopt, with mistaken and obstinate boldness, the system of the out-voted M. de Villèle as his own; nor, when told by the Chambers that his system was "deplorable,"* did he manifest the slightest intention of modifying it. On the contrary, from constitutional Resistance, he advanced to the employment of un-constitutional Force, and lost kingdom and crown for M. de Polignac's *coup d'état.* The *bourgeoisie* who surreptitiously worked the downfall of the Empire, openly and avowedly, with the people's aid, overthrew the government of the Restoration, and, from so doing, have now become the main supporters of the government of July. But now the opposite excess is to be feared. The advent of the Orleans' dynasty was a last effort to put in practice the principle of the

* The Address of 1828 : " Les plaintes de la France ont repoussé le *système déplorable* qui avait rendu illusoires les promesses de V. M."

consecration of merit—to raise capacity above birth, and substitute persons to names, but now that this has been done, and, worse than all, ill-done—the reverse of the medal is appearing, and the arrogance of the *bourgeois* threatens to equal anything of which the *noblesse* can be accused. Because a man highly born *may* chance to be undeserving of distinction, it does not follow that he is incapable, from the mere fact of his extraction, and that talent can only be allied to lowly birth and ignoble blood. But *that* is what the *bourgeoisie* of France will assert, and that is the spirit they will infuse into her institutions, if their *vanity* be not aroused to prevent it. Not that in this they obey the dictates of any liberal sentiment; on the contrary, the people, in whose ranks are to be found materials for greatness equal to any furnished forth by the upper classes, are more excluded by them than they themselves ever were by the old *noblesse*. Between the people and the nobility an alliance would, perhaps, be no difficult matter; but to effect this, such a radical revolution must take place as would make one tremble to think

of. In the present position of things, and the Orleans' dynasty fixing itself definitively as the reigning house, the *noblesse* can only be saved by consenting to rally round the throne and *intermix* with the *bourgeoisie*—I do not mean merely associate with, but mingle its very essence, its blood, its name, with the new race of *workers* in the state—with the *Tiers-Etat*. I know that this is a hard sacrifice for men brought up as are the Crillons and La Tremouilles of our days; but it is an *indispensable* one. Feudality is gone by. A mere *noblesse* can be no longer of any avail; but an aristocracy is still an eminently useful, a necessary thing.

In the present situation of France, although not an easy, it is by no means an impossible thing for the *noblesse* and *bourgeoisie* united, to constitute such a one; but, though its definite establishment and action as an organized body could not take place for many years—and till some institutions are abolished, and many prejudices overcome—the inclination to operate the fusion should be manifested on the part of the *noblesse*, or it will be too late. Many are the

elements now combined for the prosperity of France, and for her definite organization as a constitutional monarchy, such as we understand it in this country; but judgment and clear-sightedness are necessary on the part of the highest class, and the question is, to know when they will be evinced by them.

If the *gentlemen* of France do not consent to put their traditions of honour, chivalry, generous feeling and good taste, into the social scale, we shall soon see the *third* power in the sister country represented by the worst of all aristocracies—the aristocracy of gold—the most pernicious of all, the most debasing, the most corrupt, and the most likely to paralyse the natural energies of a nation. France depends, at this moment, more upon her *noblesse* than she is willing to think; but their existence depends more upon themselves than they are at all disposed to believe.

There is a spirit abroad in France, which, if legitimate cause be given for its growth, may one day break forth with a violence before which the violence of all previous revolutions shall

pale. Nothing can be more calculated to hasten such an event than the unchecked supremacy of the *bourgeoisie*. The dishonesty and corruption, the cowardice and selfishness, but, above all, the insolence of this upstart race, will, if its sway be not counteracted by the opposing force of some more elevated principle, bring down upon it, and upon the institutions it has framed, some dire and well-merited vengeance. The people of France have no faith in the *bourgeoisie;* they rely neither upon their promises, nor upon their wish to promote the happiness of the many. Child-like, they ask only to believe; but the sincerity that courts belief is wanting in those who govern. Now, truth needs but to *be;* wherever its deep waters lie hidden, there will point the divining-rod of a nation's confidence, and whenever an intelligent and a generous people instinctively, firmly, deems itself betrayed by its rulers, there is no great hazard in affirming *it is so*. Too much is still false in our fair sister country, whilst the yearning for truth manifests itself daily more and more. But Truth, which, to

gentlemen, is a mistress, to mere gold-lovers and place-beggars is a slave; the former worship that which the latter despise, and for this reason again we say that their influence is needed upon whom the traditions of a glorious line have entailed the necessity of honour and honesty.

If they do not rally round the throne, it will be disastrous to France, but it will be fatal to *them*. If they refuse to *deserve* like the rest, and *with* the rest of their fellow-citizens, it will soon be too late to obtain. If they will not yield (while the act may yet have the gracefulness of a concession) some portion of their fancied greatness, the whole will inevitably dwindle away into nothing, and they will not even remain an imposing ruin of the past.

These reflections had glided gradually into M. de Montévreux's mind, as he studied the social and political state of England. The attitude of our aristocracy astonished him, made him pause, then wonder and meditate, then admire; and at length a steady conviction settled in his mind, that he and his caste were

not only, in their present state, a monstrous inutility, but that they were a ridiculous anomaly. Compared with the ardent, persevering labourers in the political field, the heirs to high names whom he saw in the English House of Commons, working for the general good—the illustrious and idle descendants of the historic houses of France seemed to him worse even than frivolous—unworthy.

He grew to regard rank as superior to birth, inasmuch as it marked personal desert; and he could not help looking almost with veneration, upon that nobly-constituted body (in this respect, unique in the world,) in which the sons of those who bore the cross to Jerusalem with the First Richard, hailed as their *Peer*, as their acknowledged equal, the man of unknown name and illustrious merit, whose children might unite with their own. Gaston studied the pages of English History, particularly the period comprised between the reigns of James II. and Anne, of George I. and the Third George, and he found, in some measure, the counterpart of what was passing at the moment in France.

From his historical studies, and from his examination of the working of the political system in England, Gaston emerged, not an Orléaniste—too many things forbade that—but freed from the fetters of that feudal species of allegiance, which too many of his party preserve for the persons of the Bourbons of the elder branch; and he was at any rate persuaded of the positive necessity, for his caste, of abandoning their present inertness and becoming actors in the one great common cause.

CHAPTER X.

M. DE MONTÉVREUX found, however, the surface of the political world almost as much agitated in England as in France; with this difference, nevertheless, that, in his own country, the very bases and foundations upon which power was built were at every instant shaken, whilst, in ours, on the contrary, each reform was but calculated to render them more lasting and more firm. In England, he found the great distinctions of party rapidly disappearing, and merging into the uncertain tints of hundred-fold-split faction. Heavy blows had been struck at old immunities; time-worn privileges were giving way, under the pressure—from without, of some irresistible and mysterious force. Public opinion was beginning to dictate the conduct of public men, and the so-often talked of and so little

considered *people* were in a fair way to command the attention of their rulers. How much the reverse of what was passing in France!

Gaston was surprised at all he saw, and began to take a lively interest in everything connected with the changes and chances of the political world; he frequented *salons* of various opinions, and the representatives of each creed counted him amongst their habitual guests. He went a great deal to Sir Robert Peel's—which did not prevent his being received at Lady Marshdowne's, and becoming an *habitué* at the weekly *soirées* of Lady Selmerston. In the new cabinet which every one hourly expected and dreaded, Lord Selmerston was an indispensable and a principal member. His very name was a scare-crow to foreign powers, politically speaking; and yet, personally, few men were, or had been, more popular in foreign courts. Gaston had met him in many of the Parisian circles, and had even heard some of his fair countrywomen say, "What a pity Lord Selmerston is not minister! How smoothly things would go on—*quel amour de ministre!*" Alas! when Lord Selmerston was minister,

nothing could proceed less smoothly; and still, in a merely personal point of view, he remained not unpopular. Too able, and too full of sense to be called a Whig, such as the Whigs of our times have shown themselves—he was, nevertheless, marked out to be one of the heads of the daily-dreaded Whig Cabinet. His wife was, however, what the French call a *correctif;* for it was impossible to be more universally admired, either in London or Paris, than was the charming Lady Selmerston. Her family, too, and its amiable and accomplished head, Lord Rochbourne, were not only better beloved, but better trusted, than any other perhaps in either the fashionable or the political world.

At Lord Selmerston's house, M. de Montévreux had an opportunity of judging the principal component parts of the Whig-faction, and he formed no very exalted opinion of them; but a very short time sufficed clearly to show him that, what with the daring conduct and uncompromising attitude of Sir Robert Peel, and the violent hatred borne to him by the Tories, *in* the Whigs must inevitably come, and that, too, ere long. Little as he had seen of England, he could not but be aware that this

must be a hard trial for the country, and might lower its standard of political morality. He plainly perceived that, in the actual position of affairs, no party was so capable of governing the nation as the Peel-men, because none were, in fact, so liberal, or so possessed of those eclectic doctrines which are hourly penetrating into the minds of the *thinkers* in all countries and upon all subjects. Sir Robert, himself, too, their leader, he could not but esteem and admire, notwithstanding his decidedly unprepossessing manners. Had M. de Montévreux been asked to give his opinion of Sir Robert Peel, he would probably have given it thus:

His large views, brilliant talents, and moderation combined, make of him one of the most eminent, if not *the* most eminent, of English statesmen. His character, both public and private, is of unimpeachable honesty; but his manners are unamiable, and he avoids showing the good feelings, the kindness, the *heart*, in a word, which he really possesses. He affects no sympathy with the upper classes, to which he does not belong; and has never for one instant

the absurdity to deny his own origin as the son of a wealthy and most respectable trader. His self-possession is wonderful, and his temper always preserved. His talents, as a parliamentary speaker, are very remarkable: without, perhaps, being an orator of the *first* class, he is far past anything that can approach to mediocrity—soaring beyond those who occupy the very top and summit of mediocrity. He is at the very topmost height of the *second* class of orators; and the lucidity of his statements, the admirable effect of his attacks and replies, are beyond praise. He is a great debater,—not a mere speech-maker. Brilliant in the lighter qualifications of wit and repartee, he jests temperately; and more than one example of his capabilities in this style might be triumphantly adduced. His taste in the arts is remarkable; and, as a Mæcenas, few men have played the part with more judgment and munificence.

Now, in the opinion which Gaston could not avoid forming of Sir Robert, there were not a few things which seemed irreconcilable to his national prejudices; but, above all, how this

eminent statesman should, not being of noble origin, have such noble tastes? M. de Montévreux perfectly understood that Sir Robert Peel might establish a new commercial system, and overthrow the whole fabric of finance in England, to build it up again,—Colbert and Turgot went in his mind, to prove that political economy had nothing to do with genealogy,—but he did not comprehend that Sir Robert should give thousands for a Rubens or a Titian, and surround himself with that truly *elegant* kind of luxury which in France is only appreciated by the highly bred and gently born.

At Sir Robert's, Gaston met some of the members of that party which had once thought to stand or fall by its own chosen minister, and which so soon divided, leaving around him none but the devoted few who exchanged their generic name of Tories for that of Peel-men. The Duc de Montévreux had, in the intimacy of Sir Robert and of Lord Selmerston, ample means of judging of the relative positions of the three conflicting factions—the Tories, Whigs, and Peel-men; and he perhaps saw clearer into the state of affairs, as a foreigner, than did many

of those whose impartiality was necessarily impaired by the pre-occupations of self-interest.

It was evident, as we have said, that the fall of the Peel party and the accession of the Whigs to office were imminent. Sir Robert had taken fright at the impending distress in the country; famine, in his eyes, seemed threatening, and his party already felt that in his heart he had deserted them. His majority was divided, his party split into fragments, and actuated, even to the oblivion of all common prudence, chiefly, if not solely, by spite and resentment at his conduct. It was evident that, through this mortal aversion, this blind hatred of the Tories to their former chief, the Whigs must come into office; for such was the feud between the Peel-men and the Tories, that, rather than act together, most of the latter would have been content to see the Whigs in office for life! Their abuse of Sir Robert, with whom they agreed in all *but* one point, was only to be equalled by their support of the Whigs, with whom, on all *but* one point, they entirely differed! The Tories, however, were far more incensed at Sir Robert and the Peel-men, than the latter at them, for they felt instinctively that

Sir Robert had been their master; but, having some fierce declaimers at their service, and some able and acid squib-mongers amongst them, they managed to give daily offence to those who, whilst apparently their associates, were in reality their antagonists.

One thing struck Gaston as a proof of the disloyalty of all political parties, and not to be surpassed even in his own country. It was the constant recurrence, by the Tories, to the memory of a statesman to whom, Heaven knew, they were indebted for nothing save for the release they experienced at his death. And yet, the name of Canning was for ever in their mouths. Canning was one of the most remarkable *partisans* of his time; one of the liveliest, cleverest in debate, most brilliant in squib-mongery, most successful, most felicitous of the men of any time, but one to whom, certainly, the Tories owed nought. He was a man intensely hated by his many enemies, both political and personal, and hated far beyond his deserts;—one much beloved by his few friends, and hardly beyond those deserts;—one *distrusted* universally, as being supposed to be a great intriguer,

and of whom his illustrious master even said: "He might be anything he pleased, could he but *run straight.*"* In oratory, there might be some analogy between the two, for Canning was rather a good debater than a great orator. His moderation, however, bore no comparison with Peel's, for he loved to *show off.* He was *not* a temperate joker, but jested at all times, in and out of season. He was co-editor of a paper that dealt in rhyme and joke as stock in trade; his contributions were excellent, but the tone of them influenced his parliamentary talents by far too much. He was endless in debate, but in the same strain, and overdid it. In company he had a marked advantage over Sir Robert Peel; he was lively, and singularly happy and unexpected in his sallies; but, as a statesman, Sir Robert has a marked advantage over him, inasmuch as that Canning, as we have said, was more of an active partisan than a statesman. He was constantly in office, and could never be at ease when out of it. Of obscure origin, and disliked by the aristocracy, he hated and laughed at the patricians, whom he incessantly pelted with

* A celebrated English Pittite Journal has given this anecdote.

his squibs. Just before his death, which occurred at no advanced age, he left the side to which he had all his life belonged, to join his and its bitterest enemies. So that, in reality, he too did what Peel so sinned in doing; and yet the Tories, who cannot forgive Sir Robert for joining the Whigs on *one* point, were almost ready to deify Canning, who joined them on nearly every point. But Canning was tormented *to death*, and Peel yet lives—there lies the difference! Canning's excessively irritable temperament could not stand attack; and by daily attacks he was worn out, and under them he sunk. Had Peel, too, *sunk*, yielding to the weight of their malignity, the fury of the Tories would probably have been appeased. Canning, however, was the man, or the memory, chosen by the Tories, to be at each instant opposed to Sir Robert Peel, cast, as it were, reproachfully in his teeth; and it was certain that, although he was not a man to be worn out by any attacks, his love of office was not so deep-rooted as to induce him to preserve place when power was gone; and power *was* going *from* him, though it would be hard to say *to* whom. His heirs

and successors, the Whigs, should they obtain place, would do so without the shadow of power, although having at their head one or two highly-respected leaders. Incompetent to rule in its own right, or in virtue of its opinions and precedents, it was clear to all that this so-called *party* must resort to the game of mere momentary expediency,—the game sure, in the end, to fail. Such, however, was the party marked out for succeeding to the once-powerful administration of Sir Robert Peel. The head of them, it is true, was one of the best men in the whole country, and one of the ablest, too. Of high name in history; of a race long devoted to the cause of liberty, for which its ancestors had been martyrs; of great general, as well as political information; of long parliamentary experience; no one could be more fit to lead a great party, and no one more adapted to perform important public business—to say nothing of his literary accomplishments, for he had written various esteemed works, besides a tragedy of singular merit. Between him and Lord Selmerston, with the aid of Lord Marshdowne and one or two subordinate ministers, the *Chiefs* of the

Whigs were to be found,—but where were the rest? where was the *party?* "We have a Republic in France," said Danton in 1793; "but no Republicans!" and so might have said the Whig leaders in '45.

At Lord Selmerston's, Gaston met not only all those of the English nation who were not Peel-men, but also a certain number of his own countrymen who were sojourning in London. Amongst others, he became acquainted with a very clever orator of the *opposition de Gauche*, whom in Paris he had seen nowhere but at the Tribune. Gaston found M. Louvet witty and clever beyond even what he had expected; and accordingly, the aristocratical scion of the haughty Faubourg St. Germain ended by finding real pleasure in the society of the man sprung from the Revolution of July. They talked constantly together, and M. de Montévreux acknowledged, now that his eyes were opened by the studies he had commenced in England, that, on many points, M. Louvet judged more justly the state of affairs in France than he did himself.

One evening, at the house of Lady X——, Gaston was present at the first meeting between Sir Robert Peel and M. Louvet, who had hitherto confined himself to the society of the opposite faction. Lady X—— was a person who had the art of drawing around her all that was most distinguished, even when most opposed. Beneath her gentle influence every thing harsh gave way, every dissension disappeared; and, perhaps, of all women, she was the most universally beloved. Beautiful, and unspoiled, amiable, and of strict and real virtue, fascinating, and permitting no one to remember her high rank, she had but one little defect; it was not even a fault; it was what the French call a *travers;* she had allowed herself to be gained by the love of speculation. Exempt, however, from every particle of meanness, avarice, or any other sordid feeling whatever, you could scarcely find in your heart to quarrel with her for her speculations, which harmed no one but herself. She was not that most odious of all beings, a female gambler; but merely seemed to take pleasure in, to *amuse* herself by, the fluctuations of destiny in her favour or

against her; and the perfect honour and integrity of her dealings were only equalled by her imperturbable good-humour. It was no small praise to her, that, married to a man, most worthy, but more than double her own age, not the slightest shade could the breath of slander ever cast over her pure fame. Lady X—— was one of the few of her sex who had helped to shake Gaston's French prejudices in regard to women, and he involuntarily allowed himself to think that Lady Vernon was, perchance, just such another one.

When Gaston entered the room, M. Louvet was sitting by the fair mistress of the house, talking of the comparative value of English and foreign railway shares. The Duc de Montévreux laughed.

"Really," said he, "you are almost as bad as the speculators of my own immoral country, for whom, nevertheless, you cannot find terms enough of reprobation."

"Ah, M. le Duc!" smiled Lady X——, who was indulgent and liberal, like all really virtuous people, "do not think that you are one bit worse than your neighbours. I believe that, as to even *public* vices, ours are pretty nearly an equivalent for yours."

"I wish some of our great statesmen could hear you," rejoined M. Louvet. "We might perhaps hear somewhat less about the 'purity' of this country, and the corruption of our own."

"Do you think so?" said the grave tones of Sir Robert Peel, who had advanced, unperceived, from an inner room, and who, having been previously presented by Lady X—— to M. Louvet, now joined the conversation. "Do you really think that political morality is not at a much higher elevation in England than in France?"

M. Louvet looked somewhat puzzled, and then, with a slight raising of the shoulders and compression of the lips, "I don't," said he, "pretend to deny that we have corruption in France. We have certainly allowed our statesmen to dabble in the funds; and *agiotage* is not a crime against political nature, as it is with you."

With us," replied Sir Robert, "it is so decisive that, like other offences of a nameless class in common life, the suspicion supplies the place of proof, and our abhorrence of the offence makes us, against all reason, easy to believe it."

"In France," said M. Louvet, "it is so much the reverse, that we dispute who shall have the telegraph."

"As we do," said Sir Robert, "who shall lead in either house."

"But," continued the *député*, "this in no respect can affect a minister's official conduct; it has absolutely nothing to do with it, nor can—"

"Yes," interposed the Duc de Montévreux; "but it is not very fair towards the other speculators on 'Change. They sell or buy, ignorant that they are dealing with one who knows wha must make the bargain really other than it appears to them."

"I admit that," answered his countryman; "but do not your merchants, Sir Robert, do exactly the same thing? A man at Manchester has a private express, or other private knowledge of an event which will raise the price of cotton stuffs, or raise cotton itself;—he buys low, and then pockets the difference."

"Ay," rejoined Sir Robert, "but observe that all are here on equal terms; whoever sells or buys cotton is aware of the risk he runs, and

that the other party may have secured the express."

"As to that," remarked Lady X—— "the seller or buyer of stock knows that the telegraph may have been working, and have given information to the man he is dealing with."

"I agree," said Sir Robert; "but I think that only the known brokers of the ministers should be allowed to sell and buy for them. Were that so, the cases would be similar; but then none of you would care a rush for the telegraph. However," he added, "I believe you go a good deal further. What is it you call a *pot-de-vin ?*"

M. Louvet winced visibly, and M. de Montévreux looked delighted at this last attack. "Why," said the former, "it is a technical expression, a cant phrase for a *douceur*, given to persons in place, for their interest in procuring offices, or contracts, or grants of mines, or theatres, and so on."

"Yes," observed Gaston. "but *that* is not so much the question. Sir Robert Peel, I fancy, wishes to know whether you, the *official*

nation, the law-givers and ministers of France, approve of this?"

Sir Robert nodded assent.

"Very far from it," rejoined, warmly, M. Louvet; "I highly reprobate it. I hold it a corrupt practice; and, unlike mere *agiotage*, it interferes directly with official duty, and is wholly incompatible with official purity. It is mere bribery, mere corruption, and in its most naked form. Yet, have you in England nothing like it?"

Sir Robert started. Lady X—— looked surprised.

"To what *can* you refer?" asked the really incorruptible and astonished statesman. "If any one were suspected of this, he must face an enquiry, and could hope to return to his position in office, in Parliament, or in whatever other department it might be, only by the most searching scrutiny, ending in his entire acquittal."

"Possibly," replied M. Louvet, "as far as money goes; but even as to money, let us see how it is, or at least, was. I have lately read Romilly's interesting life, published by his family; a man of severe virtue, a puritan. He

avows his preference of a seat in Parliament by purchase to one by other means, as giving a more independent parliamentary existence—"

"A moment," interrupted Sir Robert. "You know, perhaps, that since 1805 the sale of seats is declared illegal, and punished as such?"

M. Louvet smiled. "Declared," said he. "Yes. Punished,—no! It goes on, I find, still; though, like our *pots-de-vin*, under the rose; and I really see no moral difference between the case of a minister who receives money for an office, and one who receives it for the choice of a man who is to fill a situation of the highest possible public importance. This was so, while the law did not denounce it; and then, on all moral grounds, it was indefensible; yet Romilly, the incorruptible, was ready to bribe a Peer of Parliament to make him representative of a place, in the House which declared, a century ago, that no Peer should, in any way, interfere with it."

"I feel," replied Sir Robert, "the full force of your allusion; but long usage begets inveterate habits of acting, and also of thinking. No one now can approve *official* bribery."

"Perhaps not," rejoined M. Louvet. "But don't you reflect on the established usage in France, by which, in old times, judicial offices were all saleable ?"

"Yes !" interposed Gaston. "Remember that the virtuous Montesquieu's grandfather purchased a President's place for his son, and the son gave it over to his nephew by a family arrangement; and that nephew, we call and venerate as the *Président* de Montesquieu, by virtue of that sale."

"I candidly grant you that is some extenuation," remarked Sir Robert, after a slight pause; "but surely the liability of such a system to abuse has caused the old and bad practice to be abolished; and you ought, without delay, to apply the same system to the *pots-de-vin*, and apply to it the same knife."

"I agree entirely with you on this point," answered M. Louvet; "but I began with avowing my reprobation of it. We now hold it wrong and illegal, and would punish it as often as discovered. But pray don't plume yourselves on your English purity, without more reflection. Don't you give places for party support? Don't

you give places to members to give up their seats to ministers thrown out at general elections? Don't you favour editors of journals, on condition of receiving their support? And are not the stock exchange and the share-market open to *them* also? Pray have not honest, respectable editors, incapable of such acts, been left out of government favour, and by all administrations, in order to buy unprincipled ones?"

"I don't deny it," replied Sir Robert. "My colleagues, and their predecessors, may have done all this. I only deny that *I* ever did it."

"I believe you most thoroughly," exclaimed Lady X——, enthusiastically; "but pray, Sir Robert, reflect that there are few ministers of your character in *any* country, for even your bitterest enemies have never so much as dreamed of uttering one syllable against your almost fabulous integrity. You know," she continued, with an arch smile, "*I* think you positively *too puritanical* on this point, and would willingly pick a quarrel with you touching your too Brutus-like virtue in some instances."

Sir Robert smiled good-humouredly. "Why, my dear Lady," he replied, "since I have not

the honour to claim you as a relative, even in the remotest degree, I do not see that my ideas on these points can ever have been an obstacle to any wishes of yours."

"But I have not said half," resumed M. Louvet. "Now, what have we in France at all comparable with the scandalous bribery at your elections?"

"Don't imagine," said Sir Robert, "that I differ from you in this. With you, I hold it abominable."

"In my sincere opinion," rejoined the French orator, "its evil effects far exceed any that can spring from official corruption. The worst effect of this is, that a less fit man than might be had, is promoted to the public service; but no harm is done to the morals of the country; whereas, corruption such as yours must taint the purity of the whole community in which it is practised."

"Yes," observed Gaston, "but the system of official corruption in France points out the government as the source of all immorality—the very fount of impurity. Is *that* an advantage? *We have grown to look upon the administration itself, upon the cabinet—(I speak*

of it as an abstraction, and without attaching any individual name to it)—as upon something openly licensed to be dishonest, and as a greedy monster, enabled, through our system of centralization, to swallow up every thing for its sole profit."

"Ah!" laughed M. Louvet, at the same time shaking his head, "How I recognise the wrong side of the river in your words. That is what *you* call *bien pensant*."

Gaston smiled. "No, no, M. Louvet," said he, gaily, "I am not now speaking as the son of one of the members of the *Chambre introuvable*, but as a loyal French citizen; and I say that, for my part, I would rather run the risk of those evils which, in individual corruption, are obviated by education and gentlemanly habits and feelings, *than see the government of my country pointed out as the avowed source of all impure and immoral practices.*"

"Alas!" said Sir Robert, "I am afraid, M. le Duc, that you do not know to what an extent *our* corruption *may* lead It is too true, that it demoralizes the public mind; for, whoever takes a bribe to give a vote, not only

betrays his trust, (every vote being given to the voter as a trust to be exercised for the public good,) but also every voter so bribed knows that he is liable to be asked, on his solemn oath, whether or not he has been bribed, and no one thus bribed ever refuses to swear he has not; so that, whoever takes a bribe, goes to the voting ready to commit deliberate and wilful perjury, if the oath is tendered to him, (and any one present may tender it.) He is as much prepared to forswear himself as the highway-robber is to commit murder, when he goes out armed, but does not slay because he is not resisted. It is quite shocking, and I admit that this should shut our mouths on official bribery."

"All this I recollect having read, years ago, in a debate in the House of Lords,"* rejoined M. Louvet.

"But are you quite sure," asked Sir Robert, turning round to his opponent, "that all is as pure in your judicial system as it is in ours? Ours has never even been suspected."

* The reader will hardly have forgotten, that the same subject was again lately handled, in the same House, by Lord Brougham.—See *the Times* of 13th of July, 1847.

"Indeed, I am only afraid of being too sure of the reverse," answered M. Louvet. "I am extremely grieved to think that our judges are allowed to be political partisans, which yours are not. Judges, with us, can sit in the House of Commons—the Chamber of Deputies;—what follows? First, they become party-men; but that is not all. They become candidates, and even in their own departments, and where they are judges; and thus their judicial conduct is apt to be biassed by their feelings as candidates, and they, or at least, their partisans, in canvassing the electors, make use of their judicial influence. Nothing *can* be worse—nothing!"

Sir Robert looked at his adversary with a kind of cautious smile peculiarly his own. "But," said he, "you could at once apply the remedy. Make them ineligible."

M. Louvet bounded from his seat with a mock shudder. "B-r-r-r!" said he, shaking himself as though to get rid of something unpleasant, "*les incompatibilités!* that is too sore a subject. Ah, *mon cher Monsieur*, do not let us talk of that—that is a question—"

"Which probably neither you nor I shall see *peaceably* decided in our life-time, but which we may, one of these days, see *violently* settled," interrupted Gaston. "I should like to see the aspect of the *Chambre des Députés* in danger of such a measure being passed.—What a tumult!"

"Why, yes," said M. Louvet, smiling, "the president might find it requisite to do as Danton did upon the occasion of my namesake's speech in the Convention, to accuse Robespierre,—and, like him, to cry, '*Silence, les blessés!*'"

Sir Robert laughed, and so did Gaston; and Lady X—— ended the long political colloquy by an invitation to come and admire the performance of some new German pianist.

CHAPTER XI.

It was not merely in a political point of view that the frequentation of English society had altered many of Gaston's opinions. His ideas of men and things generally, but especially his notions of the feminine portion of the creation, were considerably modified since he had left the continent. He found small difference, as to morality, between the high society in London and that in Paris; but then Gaston had an idea that what is termed "*good society*" is bad in every capital of Europe; but, unlike most foreigners, he neither confined himself to the metropolis, nor to the very "cream of the cream," when judging of the manners and morals of a nation. He cultivated acquaint-

ances in all ranks; and, if many a lordly castle and many a baronial hall received him as a guest, he also visited the sumptuous residence of more than one wealthy manufacturer, and accepted the cordial hospitality offered to him by more than one old county family.

It was particularly among the latter, among the race of genuine English country gentlemen, seen under the sacred shadow of their own roof, with their own household gods around them, that Gaston grew to hold in honour and reverence the name of an Englishwoman. It was as the head of such establishments, as the wife and mother in such families, that she presented to his mind a mixture of dignity and frankness before unknown and unsuspected. It was as the daughter, sister, friend,—as the unmarried girl,—that she taught him to admire the union of innocence and liberty, of independence and purity of mind, he had hitherto been quite unprepared to credit.

But Gaston had never previously been so far north as when he arrived at the Larches; and,

whatever he might have thought of English manners before, the pleasure he derived from examining them was double now. If, in the midst of the giddy London throng, he had often missed the superior elegance, the exquisite taste, and the decorous demeanour of the Parisian ladies of *haut-ton*, he never thought of regretting them here. There was so much that was better than any conventional refinements!

The party at the Larches was composed, as we have said, of the master of the mansion and his mother; of Lady Vernon, the Duke, the Commodore, and a family of cousins from somewhere in the neighbourhood of Carlisle. Mr. Hay was a first cousin of Mrs. Egerton's, who, with his wife, his son, and two daughters, regularly passed the month of October, every succeeding year, at the Larches. Mr. Hay's ancestors had originally come from the fair country north of Tweed; and it was an inexhaustible source of satisfaction to Mrs. Egerton, and to all the neighbouring squires of the

adjacent counties, with whom they were on terms of friendship, to think what incontestably *good* Hays they were! Nothing could be better; they were Hays of some dreadful place, the name of which none but northern tongues could syllable.—Balmawhapple, or something akin to that.

Mr. Hay himself was a perfect colossus, a species of Dandie Dinmont, betraying his origin at every turn. So long as "the birds" were plentiful under his gun, and he was never reduced to eat black-cock otherwise than in a stew, he appeared quite contented with the lot Heaven had cast for him in life, and joined heartily in any merriment that might be set on foot by the younger ones, or let his wife go maundering on uninterruptedly by the hour.

The good lady had a quiet, little, sniffling way of her own, of always, under the greatest possible semblance of humility, talking of the great people she had seen and known "in her day." You soon got accustomed to this, however, and might either go to sleep or leave her

in the middle of her story. You might even, if you chose, read, for the sound of her voice was so low that it could scarcely interrupt your thoughts; and whenever she approached the name of any very great Lord or Duke, (for Mrs. Hay was also of undeniably patrician extraction,) it dwindled away into such cautious murmurs that you would have said she talked on tiptoe for fear of disturbing you.

Her two daughters, "the girls" as she called them, were really very charming creatures; full of life without being vulgar, of simplicity without being silly, and of archness without being malicious. How they did admire Lady Vernon! How they did ask her to let her maid initiate theirs into the awful mysteries of *bandeaux ondulés* and *bandeaux plats*, of ringlets *à l'anglaise* and curls *à la Ninon;* and how, when, on their arrival, they were told that there was in the house a Duke—a real live Duke, (although but a foreign one, which only counts for half,) how they did adorn themselves, putting ribbons in the place of laces, and lace

where flowers ought to have been; and how they did regret that they had not brought with them the last new dresses they had worn at the race-ball at Carlisle, and wonder whether, by any human possibility, they could be sent for!

Notwithstanding all this, Frances and Katherine Hay were very nice girls; and they were very soon, to M. de Montévreux's great delight, as gently familiar with him, as though he had not been a Duke at all. Their brother, the sole heir to the Hays, was a boy of nineteen; like most other boys of that age, awkward and shy as long as you did not know him well, and bursting with mischief and love of fun when you did.

Nothing could exceed the pleasure M. de Montévreux and the young Hays took in each other's society. To him they were studies, and to them he was an eighth wonder of the world. Their excess of *naïveté* at first staggered him, then amused, then (when convinced of its reality) filled him with delight, and the

greater part of his time was spent in *drawing them out.* As to the juvenile trio (for the parents, though equally amazed, thought it more dignified not to appear so), their admiration at every thing Gaston said, did, or wore, knew no bounds. The peculiar kind of coat he put on at breakfast; the delicate embroidery of his shirt at dinner-time; the delicious perfume on his handkerchief; and the *robe-de-chambre,* slippers, and fanciful cap, in which, one morning at eight o'clock, Fanny had unexpectedly caught a glimpse of him smoking a cigar in the alley nearest the house; all these were daily, hourly discussed, and formed the incessant occupation of "the girls" and their brother.

But, above all, they liked to lead him on to talk of the glories of the London season (far greater, in their eyes, than anything connected with Paris), and to tell of the splendour of the routs and balls of the law-givers of fashion (to which, considering *he was only* a foreigner, it was wonderful he should have gone, and which

proved triumphantly in favour of his respectability).

"Well! and how *was* Lady J—— dressed?" asked Kitty Hay, following up a conversation begun some minutes before, concerning a ball given at Devonshire House.

"I should be rather puzzled to describe," replied the Duke; "but the effect was to make her outshine most of the young women in the room."

"And Lady C—— V——?" demanded Fanny eagerly.

"Like an Ondine or a Naiad; all coral, fair hair, and green weeds."

"Is that the Paris fashion?" interrupted Kate.

"Alas! no; I wish it were," replied Gaston.

"Well, but," insisted Fanny, "do tell me something about some one else. Let me see," and she mentally ran over all the newspaper-lists she had been spelling and re-spelling for the last two years. "Tell me about Lady A——, and the Duchess of S——, and Lady D——.

Oh! above all, Lady D——. A gentleman, who danced with me last month at a ball at Appleby, told me he had seen her, and that she was exactly like one of the statues of the Parthenon stepping down from its pedestal. Oh! do tell me something of Lady D——. Oh! and then besides," ran on the giddy girl, without waiting for any answer, "I want you to tell me all about that plump elderly Marchioness, who goes all over the world, and afterwards publishes all she has seen, and talks of herself all the time. You know—dear me, Kate, what is her name?"

"You mean Lady ——."

"Yes, that is the name: well," pursued Fanny, "I want to hear all about her. She must be a great curiosity; you know she actually frightened the Pope."

"No, no, Fan! it wasn't the Pope," interrupted Johnny Hay.

"Well! then, it must have been the Emperor of China; but I know she frightened somebody."

"It was the Sultan," said Kate.

"Why, what did she do to him?" asked Gaston, laughing.

"Oh!" said Master Johnny, perceiving his sisters did not quite like to tell, "she went to an audience he gave her, just as she would go to a ball—that is," and the wicked urchin, by a significant gesture, gave it to be plainly understood that the fair Marchioness's *corsage* was far from reaching to her chin.

"And that frightened his Highness, did it, Johnny?" asked Philip Egerton, with a smile.

"*On le serait à moins*," muttered M. de Montévreux.

Now this appeared to Mrs. Hay's pure ears to be rapidly verging on the improper, and she thought it advisable "the girls" should hear no farther; therefore, gathering up her worsteds, she reminded them that their unusually early breakfast had only been arranged in order that they might have time to drive over and see some show place, at the distance of ten or twelve miles, which they had seen every year for the last seven.

When all the Hays were gone, together with Mrs. Egerton, who, notwithstanding her uncertain health had decided to accompany her cousins, Philip proposed to Mildred, for after-luncheon, a snug little excursion of their own.

"I am obliged to ride over to Greystoke," said he, "on business; and the Commodore will go with me, because I want to show him Lyulph's tower, which he has never seen: but you, Milly dear, had best take Black Jenny, and, as the day is fine, give our friend the Duke a good view of the lake, from Barton and Swarth Fells. We will all ride together as far as Pooley, and then, whilst we go to the right, you will strike off to the left, and on our return from Goborough, as it will not be too late, we will ride in the direction of the Roman road to meet you, and in this way we can all trot home merrily together."

Lady Vernon agreed. She had, as we have said, no longer the slightest dread of being alone with M. de Montévreux; and accordingly, the clock marked little more than half-

past one, when the party sallied forth on their good trusty mountain hacks, to gain the road leading to Ulleswater. At Pooley Bridge, Philip Egerton and Captain Barrington bade them adieu, and Mildred, alone with her companion, led the way towards the hills above the lake.

The first portion of their journey lay through a narrow, stony lane, at the end of which a gate opened upon the moors. They had not talked much, although the roughness of the rapidly rising road obliged them to move at a foot-pace; and, from the moment they emerged from the hedges and fields, upon the lone expanse of the bleak hills, the principal part of their discourse was confined to admiring remarks upon the surrounding scenery, and comparisons between it and various sites abroad.

Gaston was a sincere lover of nature; Lady Vernon had become so; and, Heaven knows, there was around them at that moment sufficient to excite their enthusiasm. On they went, mounting and mounting still, along the

rude, rutty path—a better sort of sheep-track—which unrolled itself beneath their horses' feet. As they advanced, the brown moors grew gradually wider, and the fern-clad hills rose drearily before them. Every now and then they caught, on the right hand, a gleam of the lake shining like silver in the sunlight, and some of the rich tinted autumn foliage on its banks; and then, again, the moors spread and the hills rose swelling before them.

Philip Egerton was right: the day, at that time of year, in that county and that clime, was not a day to be lost. Over the delicate blue of the heavens the light white clouds drove flittingly, now and then throwing a transient veil between the face of the sun and the earth. Apollo, however, was good-humoured, and the winds were discreet—two rare things; and though the heat was nothing beyond a very gentle warmth, yet the caress of the fresh, invigorating October breeze was not rude enough to straighten one curl of Mildred's hair.

From time to time cantering along the rugged broken path, our travellers arrived within view of the cairn on Barton Fell. All was bleakly beautiful around. The heather, no longer glowing in its purple summer bloom, looked faded, and, as it were, threadbare, yet still it cloaked the moors in a broad garment, nobly worn as the mantle of a mendicant Hidalgo. Here and there, at great intervals, a solitary stunted tree served only to make loneliness more lonely, and the eye was arrested from time to time by fairy circles of grey stones, formed no one knew how, when, or for what end.

On went our travellers, meeting nothing that had life, save the straggling, black-faced sheep that gazed at them with drowsy eyes. On the summit of Barton Fell the scene became wilder still; and, after passing a hill stream that came brawling athwart their path, they found themselves upon the very spot which affords perhaps the most beautiful of all the views of Ullswater. Opposite to them lay the bare hillock

where commences the Greystoke estate, mantled on the right hand with the rich woods behind Pooley Bridge, and merging, on the left, into the road which leads along the daintily-fringed banks of the water towards Goborough and Patterdale. Beyond this rose the dark shadows of the more distant hills,—Saddleback, Skiddaw, and the classical Helvellyn—looking as though they had constituted themselves the protecting genii of the place, and would suffer no profanation of its peaceful solitudes.

Mildred led her companion to the very extreme ridge of the Fell, whence they looked perpendicularly down into the lake.

"Heavens! what an enchanting scene!" exclaimed M. de Montévreux. "What a country!"

"How I wish I had never left it!" sighed Mildred in a tone which made her companion start. The exclamation had been an involuntary one, and came from the inmost depths of the heart. Gaston looked earnestly at Lady Vernon, but said nothing. Her eyes were full

of tears, and she was absorbed in her own sad thoughts.

Suddenly turning to Gaston: "We had best be stirring," said she; "the day has changed; do you see that?" and she pointed to a huge black shadow that stole over the face of the lake, so silver-rippling and pellucid but a few seconds before. On looking up to the sky, Gaston saw the sun had departed, and that grey clouds were fast drifting in every direction.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried he, "it actually rains!"

Mildred smiled.

"Yes," she answered; "the rain in this country does not give you much notice of its approach; but if you are afraid of it, we can return. I am used to it, and should not mind pushing on to the neighbouring Fell, to afford you a view of the island and the head of the lake;—sometimes these cloud-shadows produce curious effects."

Upon Gaston's assurance that he cared not for the rain, they proceeded on their road

towards the cairn on Swarth Fell, and at every step the scene grew still wilder and more desolate. The livid colour of the sky had given to the earth a dull, dead tint, the desolation of which no words of mine can describe. Seen through the hazy veil of the almost imperceptible rain, the heather looked more faded, the fern more withered, and the grey stones and the black-faced sheep more ghostly. They spoke little more than before; and when they had gazed at the lake from the topmost height of Swarth Fell, Mildred, still absorbed in her own meditations, silently led the way towards the remains of a Roman road.

They had gone onwards for a quarter of an hour at most, when Lady Vernon stopped, and announced to Gaston the pleasant intelligence that she had lost her way. Immediately before them rose the side of a ragged, rugged hill, which, to their right, sloping down into a narrow valley, gave passage to a little mountain gill. Close to this stream was a rudely-constructed hut built of planks, without windows or

chimneys, and with a mere door-way for a door. Behind them was a vast expanse of moor, interspersed with patches of shingle, black moss, and those treacherous little carpets of bright green which allure the wanderer but to engulph him.

"You had best follow me," said Mildred; "I shall be a better guide than you." And so they went on, picking their way, as best they might, through all the dangers of the road, avoiding the black moss and green marshes, and carefully sounding the little pools, which are often a great many more feet deep than could readily be imagined. The sheep, as they passed them, looked more stupid, and the grouse waited till the horses' hoofs were close upon them before they soared aloft with fractious cry and crackling wing. The wind, that had been blowing wildly for the last hour, had suddenly dropped, and the rain fell less heavily; but the cold had become intense, and the light was on the wane, although it was little more than a few minutes past four o'clock.

The wanderers had not proceeded far, when Mildred, turning round to see how her companion fared, grew pale, and in a voice of considerable agitation, exclaimed, "The mist!"

"The what?" asked M. de Montévreux.

"Look behind you," replied Lady Vernon, who had turned her horse's head; and on doing so, Gaston perceived that he had lost sight of the horizon. A dense, fleecy cloud was advancing from the left, which seemed to spread itself like a shroud over the lifeless earth.

"You are better placed than I am," said Mildred, "can you still distinguish the shepherd's hut, to the right hand?"

Upon Gaston's answer in the affirmative,—"Then make for it as fast as you can!" exclaimed she; and they both galloped back, in despite of the obstacles of the road, towards the only visible shelter.

They reached it just as the mist had hidden from their view every object around them—heathered moor and shingled hill; and M. de

Montévreux had scarcely time to secure the horses to a post at the door-way of the hut, before the veil of vapour had wholly enveloped their place of refuge.

And here were Mildred and Gaston de Montévreux shut up together alone, and shut out from every earthly eye; almost, it would seem, from that of Heaven. There was no seat in this rude hut, against the walls of which Mildred leant. Gaston was close by her,—they could scarcely see one another, but each felt the other was there. This was a very different thing from being alone in the library at the Larches. Lady Vernon shivered, from outward cold and nervousness. Gaston drew nearer.

"You are suffering," murmured he, and his voice *did* tremble now. Lady Vernon's negative was pronounced in a tone more trembling still. No further words passed; but a mysterious influence forced Gaston to the side of her he loved. He took her hand. They had now just taken up the scene again at the exact

point where they had left it a year before in the sick-room of Sir Edward Vernon, when Madame de Boislambert came in. Where was she now?

Mildred did not, could not, withdraw her hand; but, oppressed to suffocation by a thousand conflicting feelings, she found, or rather sought relief in a flood of tears—wept upon Gaston's shoulder!

"Gaston," exclaimed she, "will you not protect me against yourself?—will you not save me from my own madness?"

He raised her, and, pressing her convulsively to his breast: "I will," murmured he, in a firm but whispered voice.

The first thing they saw, when the mist had cleared away, was the twinkling reflection of a star, in the little rill by the hut. They had been detained between two and three hours; it was close upon seven o'clock, and night had come on.

As they re-mounted their horses and turned their backs on the little valley, the autumn moon rose round and full over the brow of the

hill before them. After some hesitation, and a little going backwards and forwards, and then to the right and to the left, they struck into a path which pointed in the direction whither they were tending, and where the print of hoof and wheel proved to them that at least they were treading in the steps of others. A somewhat roundabout way led them across the moors, and again to the gate through which they had passed to gain Barton Fell.

Once sure of their way, they put spurs to their mountain hacks, and galloped as fast as they could to the Larches. The moon was hanging over the Lowther woods, and bathing its white rays in the blue waters of the Eamont; but all this passed now unheeded by the wanderers. They had, in their full hearts, that which defied speech.

It was near nine o'clock when Lady Vernon and her companion arrived at home; and the task of recounting the adventures of the day (whilst eating some cold grouse in the library) devolved entirely on the Duke, for Mildred,

complaining of cold and great fatigue, retired to her apartment for the night.

The "girls" and Johnny Hay laughed heartily at M. de Montévreux's astonishment at the approach of a mountain mist, and Philip Egerton recommended a plentiful recourse to whisky and water.

"I remember," mumbled Mrs. Hay, "when I was a girl, being once on a visit at the late Duke of Athol's, (the voice sunk into a whisper) when a similar thing occurred. We were to make an excursion in the neighbourhood—I forget where, but I think I can see the party now. We were admiring the beauty of the great larches—you know those were the first larches ever planted in England; my father saw them when they were sent over from Switzerland, and . . . ."

But before Mrs. Hay had got much further in her complicated tale, all her auditors had glided to their rooms, where we will leave them for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

MILDRED had triumphed, but the severest part of her trial was yet to come. The victory achieved in a moment of enthusiasm was yet to be paid for, and she had now to bear that worst of all anguish, the despondency of the one beloved. She had to learn, that no man (however high-minded) is capable of uncomplaining generosity, and that the impatience of the masculine nature revolts from the steady practice of renunciation as accomplished by a well-principled woman.

Lady Vernon was discouraged, Gaston unhappy. She was grieved to see that the Duke had not within him that firm eternal principle

which supported her through all, and made her almost glory in trampling upon her own heart; he was lost in a vague disquietude, and in cheerless speculations upon what was to come.

Gaston's devotion to Mildred was now so profound, so really unquestionable, that he felt convinced within himself that he had an undoubted right to any sacrifice she might make, and he would now not have hesitated one single instant at assuming the heaviest responsibility with which a human being can be charged. But one great source of evil was destroyed in Gaston's breast. He now believed in the individuality of affection. Mildred, at once so impassioned and so chaste, had overthrown for ever the hateful principle which, in regard to the other sex, leads too many of his countrymen to acts of ingratitude, injustice, and dishonour. He was convinced that coldness in woman was not the sole motive for good conduct, and that an ardent disposition was compatible with purity. He had grown to respect (because

really to believe in) those who adhered to the right, and had learnt to pity sincerely those who strayed from its paths. His indulgence to error was now profound and sincere, without degenerating into indifference to vice. He felt persuaded that a woman *might* commit a fault for him she loved, who, *but* for him, would have been honoured all her life; nor did he any longer think that the debasing sentiment, "if not me, another," could be alleged, to lighten her seducer of the fearful load of responsibility he had voluntarily assumed. Still, Gaston loved Mildred; and in proportion as he loved her, so was he restless and unhappy, because, in proportion as he honoured and believed in her, so did he conceive he had a claim upon all she could give—upon her honor, her peace of mind, her fair name.

Poor Mildred! No one can say her position was not a hard one. She had begun by feeling wildly, flutteringly happy, at the idea of Gaston's love; to this, her sense of duty, of temptation overcome, and of high resolve to do what was

right, had added a kind of enthusiasm that coloured all her thoughts with a tinge of the sublime. Whilst Gaston was now miserable save when she was near him, and could reiterate by word or look a tender assurance of regard, she, on the contrary, could almost have been resigned never to behold him more! In the deep conviction that she was loved, lay the accomplishment of every desire; and, wrapped up in the delicious consciousness of this more than mortal bliss, Mildred lived mentally apart from her fellow-beings, in a sphere entirely her own.

Nevertheless, it must be a hard trial for any in her position to behold one—rather than not sacrifice whom, to a feeling higher still, she would have willingly encountered death, and who, yet, was dearer to her a thousand times than life,—to behold him disheartened, letting his existence run to waste; to hear him repeat, over and over again, that she, and she alone, could cheer him, support him, give him strength; to see him—making reproach more bitter by not

reproaching—silently appeal to her by looks and sighs, at every hour;—this is what few can withstand, (the better they are, the less they resist), and this is what Mildred patiently bore.

Patiently? yes! but without pain? Oh, no! Deep and torturing was the anguish she endured, bitter the tears she shed, fervent the incessant prayers she breathed. If ever Mildred had formerly by her wanton pride added a pang to the already crushed heart of the conscience-stricken guilty, she more than expiated it now, for her own was sorely wrung. But Lady Vernon was destined to exercise a still more positive, a higher influence over the earthly career of the Duc de Montévreux.

Since Mildred's arrival at the Larches, the *Journal des Débats* had been added to the various newspapers and periodicals which crowded the library table.

"A long list of promotions to the Peerage," said she, one morning, glancing, as it seemed, carelessly over the columns of the ministerial paper, "and a vacancy in the deputation,"

and then, as though merely intent on reproducing in speech what her eye saw, she read: "By the sudden death of M. ——, the Chamber finds itself unexpectedly deprived of a useful and intelligent member. The electoral college of —— will be convoked on the 20th of November, for the purpose of electing a deputy." She had read this slowly, and with her eyes (unnoticed by the rest of the party) fixed all the while upon Gaston, who was tormenting the fire. She now placed the paper upon her lap, and, still looking steadily at the Duke, she named the name of the *arrondissement* in question.

"M. de Montévreux," added she. "Is not —— in the neighbourhood of an estate of yours?"

"Oh, yes!" replied he, "we have in that Department more property than I care to think of, for I ought to give it somewhat more of my personal attention, and that is really impossible; it lies so very far off!"

The conversation dropped. Some hours

later, Gaston and Lady Vernon, (for they were ever together now) were sitting on a rustic bench at the extreme end of the park, watching the dark shadows thrown by the sunset on Cross Fell.

M. de Montévreux was in one of those sullen moods, in which, as I have already said, lovers so often delight to indulge.

"And so," said she, mildly, "you refuse to go with the Commodore to Scotland?"

"I will relieve you of my importunate presence whenever you like," answered he, bitterly; "but I will not go with any one, anywhere; I want to see no more sights, no more countries, no more people; I am sick and tired of them all, and will go—no matter where."

"I think," replied Mildred, gently, "considering that it was I who first advised you to leave us, you might have treated the proposition with a little more courtesy; you might have thought of my honour, of my reputation!"

"God knows!" replied Gaston, "neither have suffered for my sake!"

"Would you rather they had?" asked, gravely, Lady Vernon.

"I wish nothing," rejoined he, pettishly; "but I see clearly enough what *you* wish—wishing costs nothing," he continued, maliciously, "and it is easy for you to desire what it is difficult for me *only* to execute."

"Gaston!" exclaimed Mildred, reproachfully.

He relented, he felt he had gone too far, had been unjust; and, powerless before that reproaching voice and those tearful eyes, the next moment saw M. de Montévreux imploring forgiveness of Lady Vernon. He exhausted every name in the soft vocabulary of affection, and poured forth the sincere and passionate sentiments of his inmost heart in words of flame, and in a tone the deep truthfulness of which would have carried conviction to a mind less interested than Mildred's in believing all he said.

"But you judge me too harshly," urged he, "for you do not comprehend what I suffer," (and this was true, for whilst Mildred, in the ecstatic sense of being beloved, had her head in the clouds and scarce touched our terrestrial sphere with her feet, Gaston, like the rest of his fellow-men, remained "of the earth earthy,") —"you cannot enter into that uneasy, jealous feeling. . . . ."

"Jealous!" echoed Mildred, with almost indignant surprise.

"I do not use it in the acceptation you attach to the word," replied Gaston; "but I mean that species of jealousy which would deny the blessing of your mere presence to every creature except myself. I mean a restless, unquiet, torturing sentiment, that prevents me from breathing where you are not, and does not afford me perfect happiness when you are near."

Lady Vernon sighed, and looked with tender pity on her lover.

"Mildred!" exclaimed he, vehemently, "what

would you have me do? leave you? go forth from hence? But whither? where am I to find peace apart from you? where rest from this eternal longing, from this ceaseless desire to be for ever by your side? I cannot go into strange countries, where your image must ever be between me and every object around; and how shall I return into my own, with my whole being thus changed?

"Do you think," he continued, looking Lady Vernon in the face, "do you think that now, I could bear to hear love profaned as both you and I have heard it? do you think that now, I could calmly sit by, and listen to my boon companions of old as they insulted with their ribald jests the name of woman, in the form of their mistresses? That I could go through all the world's hollow ceremonial of conventional gallantry with women who disgrace and sully all that is holiest under Heaven?

"No! no!" ended he, in a mournful tone, "if you have forced me to *believe*, Mildred, you have left me to regret; you have made

me a better man, but you have unfitted me to live in what my compeers call life,—society! Pah! I loathe it, and what remains? 'Othello's occupation' is indeed gone, and what resource is left?"

Mildred fixed her deep azure eyes on his, and laying her hand on M. de Montévreux's, "Action!" said she, in a low, firm tone.

Gaston looked at her steadfastly, enquiringly; she did not withdraw her glance, and each for a moment gazed into the other's face as though they would read one another's souls. Lady Vernon had struck upon a secret chord that never failed to vibrate in Gaston's breast.

"Action!" he repeated musingly, "would you have me enter foreign service, and lose an arm or a leg, and gain a dozen differently-coloured ribbons in the cause of some *soi-disant* king, whom half the continent rejects and whom nine-tenths of his own subjects even do not acknowledge?"

"Nay," replied she, "if military renown

seemed to me the employment to be advised, I would say, go to Algeria; there at least—"

"I should have ample opportunity of learning the art of Arab horsemanship, and of adorning my saddle-bow with Bedouins' ears, cut off whilst playing at hide and seek with Abd-el-Kader," interrupted the Duke.

"That, and some others, are the very reasons," rejoined Mildred, "why I do *not* propose to you to follow the career of arms. The moment is gone by for the glory of the *épaulette*, and the *moment* is everything in your country. But there are other means than the sabre, of aiding the common cause in France."

"Diplomacy," hinted the Duke.

"I was not thinking of that," answered she, "though I am aware it is the career that flatters most those of your caste, and that they make it the bridge over which to pass from what they term *proper* opinions to practical ones; but there is another path to fame," pursued she, watching intently the

expression of her lover's face, "to power—to the noblest, and best of power—*to that of achieving public good.*"

She stopped. Gaston held down his head, and bent his eyes silently on the ground.

"You know to what I allude," resumed she, "not to that tribune to which you have lost your hereditary right; but to another, which is honoured by the names most important to France; a Berryer, a Thiers, a Lamartine—nay, amongst your own set, even—a Larochejacquelin.

"What!" asked the Duke in an uncertain tone, "would you have me enter the Chamber, as a member of the Opposition *de droite?*"

"I would not, and *you know* I would not," replied Mildred. "Frankly avow to me, Gaston," she added seriously, "that your opinions and mine, on this point, are no longer opposed."

M. de Montévreux looked as though he had rather she would continue to guess the fact, than oblige him to a confession of it.

"Gaston," she resumed, "you want moral courage to face what makes every Frenchman quail—ridicule."

"No, on my honour it is not that."

"Then you dread being accused of a defection —of the desertion of a party hallowed by misfortune." (Gaston coloured.) "That is it! Your chivalrous impulses are enlisted on the legitimist side, and you have not the strength to sacrifice them to the really right. For shame! This is the fault of all the best and the sincere portion of your faction. You are truer to a party than to your country; but you, individually, who are conscious that that party is not only destitute of all shadow of hope, but that, could it succeed, it would be a public calamity—you have no right to withhold your support from an order of things, capable, *as you know*, of producing good results;—and, mark me," she continued, with growing energy; "I make here no question of *persons;*—I do not say that the man whom you abhor is the necessary representative of Constitutional Monarchy in France, nor do I say that your own Henri de Bourbon is for ever precluded from that position—but I *do* say, that unless care be taken to protect the sincerity, the truth, of the representative form of Government in France, disasters will ensue, such as every good patriot and every honest man would give readily his life's blood to avert."

"And yet you think the return of our legitimate Princes would be a calamity?" murmured Gaston.

"I think no such thing," replied Mildred; "and I have told you so; but I am convinced of what I said—that the return of your *party* would be the direst of misfortunes to France. If ever the Duc de Bordeaux remounts the throne of his ancestors, it must be *without his party;* it must be *by the will of the people.* That is why I repeat to you, Gaston, that the path of your duty lies straight before you: those who shall not have laboured for the *general good* of France,—content to receive reward *only when it is earned,*—are her most unworthy sons."

"Ah! if I dared!" sighed the Duke.

"Dared!" replied Mildred, with flashing eyes; "*dared*, M. de Montévreux!" and a slight curl of her lip was very nearly expressing contempt; "dare do that which is right—dare to support your own profound and now *immutable* conviction," she added, with an authoritative gesture; "dare to be honest, to be true to yourself, and to your country! For Heaven's sake, Gaston! dare for once to do all this, or I

confess I must think very differently of you from what I have hitherto done."

"You would convert one already converted," said M. de Montévreux, smiling; and, in a graver tone, he added: "I *will* dare all you say; but it is a sacrifice, requiring a stoical force for which our aristocratical education but ill befits us. Nevertheless, I *will* accomplish it; for, as you have said, I *do* know and avow it to be the right."

Lady Vernon held out her hand to him, and with a countenance beaming with joyful tenderness: "I, too, am not much of a Roman," said she, "for I cannot find strength sufficient to desire that the sacrifice (which I know to *be* one) should be all made on the altar of conviction, and my gratitude—"

"Will be doubled when you see me replace M. —— as deputy for ——. Is not that it?" he inquired.

Mildred smiled her assent; and as they rose and walked away, there was a pleasant thoughtfulness, a sort of serious delight upon Lady Vernon's beautiful brow, that seemed to denote she had at length found her recompense, and that inward peace had been won by sacrifice.

CHAPTER XIII.

We will now return to Paris, and see how Sir Edward Vernon has passed his time since we last took our leave of him. The idea of Mildred's approaching departure was perhaps, on the whole, rather agreeable to him than otherwise. Sir Edward had insensibly arrived at that worst of all stages for a weak man who has been led from folly into vice: he was beginning to feel ashamed of himself.

A strong-minded man may be sorry for something he may have done. Regret and repentance usually foster the determination to retrieve; but shame is a sterile sentiment, and the first step towards degradation. When a man has not

had strength sufficient to avoid doing that of which he should be ashamed, he is too weak for that shame to be productive of anything but still further self-abasement.

Sir Edward, who saw no hope of extricating himself from what he now recognised as the wrong, did not care that the wife he had ill-treated should remain constantly before his eyes, as the very incarnation of his own reproving conscience; and when she announced her intention of leaving Paris, he secretly rejoiced over the deliverance; not from a restraint, but from the permanency of an unwelcome and merited reproach.

But how had Sir Edward discovered that his pleasant course was not the right one? Simply because it was no longer so pleasant, and that, of the thousand unavoidable miseries which, unpitied, attend upon vice, and are the first mysterious signs of the awakening of Retributive Justice, the least expected and bitterest had just risen up before him: the fell suspicion (that is only not certainty because it *will* not be so)

of the one, who, like to the baleful star of the swamp, has lured the wandering heart from its broad, straightforward path.

After passing the remainder of the night, during which we had seen him agree to Lady Vernon's sudden departure, partly on his arm-chair before the expiring fire, partly on a couch whence refreshing sleep had fled, Sir Edward rose, and, awaiting the hour when he could hope for ostensible admittance to Madame de Cévèzes, sallied forth on foot to gain the Rue de la Rochefoucauld.

The walk was a long one, and he hoped in the fresh morning air to collect and calm his scattered thoughts of the night.

If the truth must be told, what Sir Edward feared most, was the Baroness's effrontery, and her absence of all regard for outward seeming. He dreaded lest she should avow that of which he must accuse, and thus leave him no choice but an open, irrevocable rupture. Whether Sir Edward really *loved* Aurélie is an almost unanswerable question, and would lead one into

examining how much, if any of that sacred feeling, of that holy aspiration called love, *can* enter into the short-lived, miserable *liaisons* of such as they and their fellow-sinners of the world. But the utmost extent of restless desire that he could feel, had been attained by the passion inspired him by Madame de Cévèzes. It was, besides, no slight matter for his vanity. In the society he frequented, she occupied what one might call the throne, and he was an object of no small envy and deference who should be supposed to be this "Cæsar's Cæsar."

These, combined with suggestions of a more purely jealous nature, were the thoughts that racked Sir Edward's brain, as he walked down the Champs Elysées, turned into the Rue d'Angoulême, and, crossing the Faubourg St. Honoré, proceeded up the Rue de la Pépinière.

At the corner of the Rue de Courcelles he was arrested by some one catching hold of his arm, whilst a familiar voice exclaimed—(it was only half-past twelve): "Why, Vernon, where the devil can you be bound so early? In this

direction too! I should have better understood it, if you had been coming the other way," and the speaker cast a knowing look in the very direction whither Sir Edward was tending.

"As to that, Mowbray," replied the latter, "I might as well return your question, and ask what brings you before visiting hours, so far from your own quarters?"

"My dear fellow," replied the Colonel, "a *garçon* is an irresponsible being, and may have, for aught you know, as many quarters as the shield of an Austrian prince; but to those I have just left I am scarce likely to return, for I have received due notice to quit."

"How!" exclaimed Sir Edward, anxiously, as they walked on together; "you surely do not mean Madame de Tresmes?"

"Indeed I do," rejoined his philosophical companion.

"But how?" insisted Vernon.

"Oh! in all due form. In that of Nathan Cronstadt's cabriolet, which the groom himself, an English booby, whom I cross-examined on

the point, avowed had been there since three o'clock this morning"

"And you?—"

"Why, in conscience, now," interrupted the Colonel, calmly, "what would you have me do? At my age (Colonel Mowbray was considerably past forty) the only maxim for a sensible man, is that of Henri IV.: '*il faut que tout le monde vive*'; and upon that, I systematically act. In the first place, you see, my dear fellow, Madame de Tresmes was decidedly above my means. I must in future confine myself to the Rue Lepelletier* and its vicinity, or be condemned for the rest of my days to German watering-places and play; therefore, so far, this is lucky; and next, one cannot fight with the Baron Nathan—a Jew! a man who is rich enough to dispense with being anybody's equal! Bah! Besides, I have had enough of substantial, professional fighting in my days, not to see any fun in your amateur sword and pistol work. That

* The street where the Grand Opéra is built.

is all very well for such youngsters as you and Moreton. *A propos* to that, Vernon," suddenly ejaculated Colonel Mowbray, interrupting himself in his own phrase, and turning a searching glance on his companion, "I hope all's right with the Baroness?"

"D—n that fellow, Lenz! how ill these boots are made!"

"Never mind the boots, but listen to me," reiterated the Colonel. "It's a question of five hundred pounds."

"What?" cried Sir Edward, fiery red with the exertion of stooping to arrange his boot, no doubt.

"Well, don't make such a row, nor look as though your being out of a straight waistcoat were a thing against which peaceable citizens had a right to protest; but just be quiet while I tell you that, if there were any screw loose between you and your Dulcinea, I should lose five hundred pounds sterling—twelve thousand, five hundred francs, (and somewhat more, owing to the high rate of exchange);

whereas, in the contrary case, I make a clear gain of a thousand portraits, in pure gold, of the gracious face of her Majesty Queen Victoria."

"Speak plainly, in the d—'s name, Mowbray, can't you?" interrupted Vernon, more exasperated than he could disguise.

"Well, then," rejoined his friend, "since you will not stand even the shadow of a joke—(you should study Brillat Savarin more closely, I am certain you don't pay sufficient attention to *what*, and much less still to *how* you eat and drink—but *n'importe!*)—I will tell you what is the matter. Your friend, Lord Avondale," (the Colonel smiled a peculiarly dry, ironical smile of his own, for the young peer in question was the man Vernon in his heart disliked the most in the world, and to whom, on the preceding night, he had lost so large a sum), "has taken an immoderate fancy to that she-devil of yours—pardon my freedom, but you know this is a compliment amongst *lionnes*. He admires her beyond all things, and says she is quite *in his way*."

"Well, and what then?" muttered Sir Edward, with concentrated wrath.

"What then?" resumed Mowbray. "Why, betting ran high last night at the club, and Adrien de Fontrailles, who ought to know what he was about, staked a thousand pounds to five hundred (for Adrien has lived so much in England that he understands English money) upon Avondale against you, and I took the odds: *voilà tout.*"

"Is *that* all?" asked Sir Edward, affecting indifference.

"All!" echoed the Colonel. "Bravo! It does my pocket good to hear you; but have you calculated the advantages of your adversary? Think what an out-and-outer he is; only consider what he has already devised. At the steeple-chase on Thursday he has arranged, at nobody knows what cost, to establish and decorate a small stand all to himself, which he is to offer to the Baroness, for the sole use of herself and her party. They say it is to be after the fashion of the pavilions used by royal ladies

in the tournaments of the middle ages, and perfectly gorgeous, from what I hear."

"Well," muttered Sir Edward, "we shall see what comes of it; but I don't much fear Avondale, notwithstanding all that."

"Now, go thy ways, boy, and speed thee," said Mowbray with mock solemnity, as they gained the Rue Blanche. "Some say confidence invites success, and I hope it may prove so in this case, for I am deucedly out of tin, and could ill spare six hundred-and-fifty Naps;" and so the friends parted.

Sir Edward was more disconcerted than ever; and the consequences of a quarrel with Aurélie appeared more terrible at each moment. The muscle, or whatever it was, that did him duty for a heart, was swelling with rage against Chavigny, whilst, at the same time, his vanity was boiling over with jealousy at his new rival, Avondale. He felt that, whatever might be the real state of the case, the latter would be looked upon as the winner of the game, and that he, Sir Edward Vernon, must pass in the

eyes of the world, for being sacrificed to the man of all others he disliked, just as Moreton had been sacrificed to him.

The Marquis of Avondale was certainly not a man to be treated lightly, when he had determined upon a thing. Young, good-looking, enormously rich, he had, what in the eyes of the other sex would almost alone suffice to outweigh all his other qualifications: the reputation of a genuine dare-devil; or, as the Colonel in his elegant phraseology styled it, "*an out-and-outer.*"

There was nothing of which Lord Avondale was not supposed to be capable—from cracking a policeman's skull to running away with a peeress; from horsewhipping a Russian officer in the exercise of his functions, to the pulling the beard of Mehemet Ali, or the Sultan himself. His disorderly exploits were innumerable, and if he did not, like the Redskins, adorn his breast with human ears and human teeth, it was doubtless because such ornaments were unclean, and not of perfume sufficiently nice

to be borne so near the nose; for Lord Avondale was a mighty fine gentleman in his way; fair-haired, white-handed, and soft-spoken, and who constantly spent three quarters of the day in bed. He had that insatiable want of physical expansion and mere brute activity which in gentlemen produces riot, and in the lower orders, crime. Broken heads and maimed legs were to him what air and water are to the million, the absolute necessities of life; and when he had quietly *milled* some unlucky wight, and pounded his bones to a jelly, he felt comfortable, like a man who has not only eaten, but dined well.

There was, however, something in this character which gained particular favour in ladies' eyes. Almost all women have an instinctive dread of man's natural cowardice. They feel themselves so much bolder than the other sex (probably from their much rarer occasions of being called into positive action), that there is scarcely one amongst them who does not fear the flinching from her side of her male

accomplice in the hour of danger. In this respect, therefore, Lord Avondale was destined to the greatest triumphs, but no woman seemed yet to have made so strong an impression upon him as Madame de Cévèzes; and Sir Edward Vernon could not help recognising that he now ran a double risk.

A prey to, perhaps, as much perplexity as rage, since his conversation with Colonel Mowbray, he entered the apartment of Aurélie. The *lionne* was at her toilette, and the indispensable, unavoidable, provoking *femme de chambre* was there; seemingly busy about her mistress's head-gear, and really on the watch for every varying change of the official adorer's countenance.

The Baroness's dressing-room was in accordance with her habits and character. You entered it by passing through a bed-chamber *Louis Quinze*, where the couch of the absent nymph was represented by a gilt *conque de Vénus* overhung by the filmy cloud-like veils that simulated a Nautilus in full sail, and

mounted upon an *estrade* of the most exquisite Rocaille. This was undoubtedly in very impure taste, but, therefore, only the more descriptive of the owner.

From the deep step-disguising carpets and rococo-painted walls of this dimly-lighted bower, you passed into the dressing-room, and thence into the boudoir. If, before gaining this middle region, you might fancy yourself at Versailles, in the hidden retreat of *la Du Barry*, beyond it you would think yourself transported into some castel of the *moyen âge*. Stained glass in the window, Cordova leather on the walls; high-backed, gloomy chairs, black chests whose shelves displayed the lizards, lobsters, lampreys of Pallissy's monstrous plates; trophies of curious arms, and chess-boards of antique date, all denoted the ruling fashion of the furniture of a barbarous day.

In the dressing-room were perhaps still more clearly manifested the real habits of the inmate, than in either of the adjoining chambers, which told more of Aurélie's affectations than of her tastes. But nowhere were there any traces of

what Bulwer has so aptly styled, "the sweet feminine habits which betray so lovelily the whereabout of women." All was either affected or wrong; what was affected was masculine, and what was natural, impure.

Madame de Cévèzes was seated in a capacious *bergère* opposite to her *Psyché*, and, unless you watched narrowly certain feline expressions of the glittering eyes, you would have said that never did mirror reflect a more Psyche-like face. On the toilet-table at her side, one of Aucoc's splendid *nécessaires* held forth to view its golden toys by the side of a case of Manton's hair triggers. A beautiful pair of Greek pistols, richly inlaid, were suspended close to the glass over the chimney-piece, where sundry daggers and other bauble weapons divided the adornment of the walls with ebony and ivory castanets—for Aurélie prided herself on dancing the Cachucha and other eccentric dances with more *style* than the Elssler.

Before the fire lay stretched a dog—no lady'

pet, spaniel, greyhound, or poodle; but a huge Newfoundland, who, when he rose, made the room look too small, and on whose shaggy back his mistress could have ridden. Horsewhips were thrown on the sofa that occupied one side of the diminutive chamber; spurs on the table that stood in the centre; whilst on a chair close to the fire-place was displayed a full costume of *débardeur*,* wig and all.

The Baroness was attired in a snowy flowing robe of India muslin, lined with delicate blue silk, and edged all round with lace worth a Duchess's dowry. Her imperceptible feet were cased in quilted slippers of white satin, lined and trimmed with the cygnet's down. Her long luxuriant fair hair was, under her own immediate inspection, undergoing the process of being twisted into one large thick rope, which, forming a double coronet at the back of her tiny head, and circling round a particularly

* A peculiar and very becoming dress, usually adopted by the *sort* of ladies who like to frequent masked balls in male attire.

dark-tinted tortoise-shell comb, was singularly becoming to her. In front, the two rich tresses destined to swell into *bandeaux renflés*, were twirling themselves into a thousand wavy curls under her little rosy-nailed white fingers.

The Baroness, in imitation of the fair dames of the old *régime*, frequently allowed her intimates to assist at certain portions of her toilette, and this was a privilege never denied to the Moretons and Sir Edwards of the hour.

When Vernon entered, his pale face and gloomy brow instantaneously struck Aurélie.

"What, in Heaven's name, *mon cher*, makes you come here with such a face?" cried the spoiled child, not deigning to cast a look otherwise than through the medium of the mirror, upon her miserable admirer.

"I have to speak seriously to you," replied he in English, which language was familiar to Madame de Cévèzes.

"Then you may count upon my not listening," retorted she with pretty disdain. "So you had best take another tone, and try to be

amusing. You have just come in time," continued she, recurring to her own idiom, "to help Victorine and I in our decision touching yonder disguise, for the *bal de la mi-caréme*, (pointing to the *débardeur's* dress.) Now don't," she added, "pray, look as though you never saw such a costume before, or wished to be ignorant that such things were; but tell me whether you advise blue satin trowsers or white, *galonnés* with black velvet bands and pearl buttons?"

"Oh! white, of course," answered Sir Edward, just as he would have said black, or blue, or red, or orange, or any other colour under the sun, and only to get rid of the question.

"There! you see now, Victorine; just what I said," remarked Aurélie.

"Ah! but *Milord* always *does* happen to guess just exactly what Madame la Baronne approves," said slyly the adroit abigail. Aurélie laughed.

Sir Edward placed himself with his back to the fire, and leaned against the chimney-

piece. "Take care!" said he in a suppressed tone, and again adopting English as his mode of speech. "I *can* bear this no longer. Where were you last night?"

That one phrase was enough for Aurélie, who went upon the principle that whatever really *is* may be known, though it should take place in the earth's most hidden cavern.

"Where was I?" repeated she in an apparently careless tone. "Why, let me see: one," —and she counted on the tips of her rosy fingers—"one! two! three! . . . three, four! Yes, that was all. I was only at four places. First, Madame de Maurienne's; then, the Sardinian Embassy, where we met; after that, a moment at Madame Delmar's; and lastly, at a mortally stupid party at mamma's. She really has got now such a set of people about her, that it is quite intolerable . . . ."

"But were you nowhere else?" murmured Vernon, almost in a tone of menace. "Try and recollect: where were you at two o'clock?"

"Why, as to that," replied she, with match-

less effrontery, "I really am not quite so sure. To the best of my knowledge, I was in the next room, asleep; but my soul may have been in some region to me utterly unknown. I really cannot say whether I was in the past, the present, or the future. I may have been playing the fiddle with Nero in the midst of the burning of Rome; or helping the King of Prussia to compose a speech; or feasting in Tahiti with the *bon-vivants* to come, when New Zealand and the Sandwich Isles are to be the centres of civilization . . . ."

"For Heaven's sake," continued Vernon in a still more serious tone, "cease this nonsense, and tell me . . . ."

"Nonsense, indeed!" echoed Aurélie. "I wish you had heard, as I did last night at mamma's—what's the man's name?—the great magnetiser, proving to us that we were all a hundred thousand people at once, and that our souls were not our own! (I perfectly remember that poor papa's never was). He clearly made out that I was not I, at this present

moment, but that I was some one who will live a thousand years hence; and that mamma was probably the Egyptian lady who discovered Moses in the bulrushes."

"I entreat you," resumed Sir Edward—considerably relieved, since he found that the Baroness's intention was (for what end, it is impossible to say) to deny a fact, of which he himself then resolutely determined to doubt, "I entreat you, tell me: were you, last night—or rather, this morning—were you in the environs of the Rue Taitbout?"

"In the first place," reiterated Aurélie, with perfectly successful effrontery, "I was not near the street you name at any hour of the evening; for mamma's being my last visit, I came home by the lower road, by the Rue de la Pépinière, and the Rue St. Lazare. And as to the hour, I passed every hour of the morning in my bed, for I was home singularly early, I remember. Do you chance to know what hour it was when I came in last night, Victorine?" added she, applying in French to her maid.

"Indeed, I do, Madame," replied the abigail, who piqued herself on her memory and her exceeding precision. "The eleventh stroke of twelve was just striking when I heard Guyot undo the gates to let in Madame la Baronne's carriage."

"Yes! I thought it was somewhere about that," observed the Baroness negligently; and then, turning half round: "but I should like to know why you ask?" she added, with admirably feigned ignorant innocence.

"Oh! never mind; I cannot tell you," answered Sir Edward in a gentler tone than he had hitherto adopted.

"Well, then, maker of mysteries, I will tell *you* something," rejoined she gaily. "I was last night made acquainted with your famous countryman—that handsome Lord who breaks everybody's head, and is so agreeable; and I must say he is the only Englishman I have seen, except C—— and Y——, (whom I look on as *of us*) who is entirely divested of that sheepish shyness of which I have never yet

been able to cure you. He is quite delightful, and . . . ."

There is no saying how much longer Madame de Cévèzes might have gone on, pouring wormwood into Vernon's ears, by her praises of Lord Avondale, had not the entrance of a middle-aged woman, whose appearance denoted an upper servant, changed the whole current of her thoughts.

"*Ah, ma bonne Mariette!*" exclaimed she, clapping her hands, and with almost breathless anxiety. "Well! and what news of Constantin?"

"Alas! Madame la Baronne, I have nothing good to tell."

"Nothing good!" cried Aurélie, in an angry voice. "How so?"

"Why, Madame . . . . I hope Madame will promise not to be angry," stammered the woman; "but . . . ."

"*Que diable!*" said Madame de Cévèzes, stamping her pretty foot and knitting her brows. "Don't stand stuttering there, woman! but tell me the whole at once."

"Well, then," began Mariette, "I represented what an excellent customer Madame la Baronne was, and how many good round sums she had brought into M. Constantin's pocket; at all of which he bowed, and said there was no lady in Paris in whose head he took a greater pride; but when I hinted that, if he would not tell Madame what she wanted to know, Madame would leave him, and never recommend him again, he, with profound respect, said, that notwithstanding the grief he should feel at Madame la Baronne's wearing any one's flowers but his, he would rather lose his whole connexion and his fortune, than betray to one customer the secrets of another."

"*Quel monstre !*" cried Aurélie; "but women never know how to manage these kind of matters—it should have been a man. You may go, I don't want you," said she sharply, and Mariette retired; then, at the end of ten minutes, "And you may go, too, Victorine," added the Baroness with undisguised vexation.

Madame de Cévèzes rose from her chair, and, slowly advancing with thoughtful air and

step, sank leisurely into a *fauteuil*, placed by the side of the fire. Her two wee feet rested on her huge canine favourite's back, and whilst one wee hand supported her pretty chin, the other served as a rest to a rounded elbow, that was nearly visible through the aperture of her long hanging sleeve. For some moments the *lionne's* gaze was fixed musingly on the fire; she then gradually and slowly raised it, until it rested upon Sir Edward's still anxious face. Their eyes met; and with a true syren's smile—wherein was adroitly shown a tenderness which pre-occupation, however strong, could not quell—she held forth languidly the tips of her dainty fingers to be kissed.

Sir Edward forgot every other consideration, every calculation of prudence, every hesitation of vanity, and, dropping involuntarily upon his knee before the unworthy object of his love, and literally wringing her tiny hands in his.

"Aurélie," said he in accents of *genuine* anguish, and wherein trembled the *real* tone of agonizing doubt, "*swear* to me that you did

not, last night at two o'clock, get down from a *citadine* at the door of Chavigny's house!"

The Baroness fixed on her lover the kind of look you would give to an individual whose sanity you had just discovered reason to question; and then threw herself back in her chair in a positive convulsion of laughter:

"*Enfant!*" said she, in an indescribably compassionate tone, as soon as she had imposed a restraint on her hilarity, "do you take me for Madame la Marquise de Boislambert? No, *Edouard*," she pursued in a more serious voice, "you should have known me better than to suppose that *I* would bestow my affections upon a notary's son."

This succeeded. Generally speaking, if you wish to persuade even good people of something they are prepared to doubt, avow carelessly a bad sentiment as the motive for your action (though the action questioned should, in itself, be a meritorious one), you will be believed more readily than if you assigned a praiseworthy feeling as the cause of your praiseworthy act.

So it was with Vernon; when he heard Aurélie adduce an absurd, genealogical sort of pride as the motive for her utter indifference to Chavigny, he believed what he might have still continued to doubt, had she referred to a sense of honour towards himself.

Besides, of a truth, Sir Edward was not sufficiently corrupt to conceive that a woman could defend herself in that one particular way against such an accusation; and use, against a man in whose favour she was committing such compromising acts, arguments which should tend to throw shame—and worse, ridicule—upon the object of her guilty choice. He, therefore, believed he had been the victim of a complete and entire delusion; a likeness, a phantom conjured up by the over-excitability of a too easily jealous nature; and he was happy, and again relapsed into his usual habit of pouring forth love-hymns to Aurélie.

At last, perceiving her visible preoccupation to persist:

"What," asked he, "was the negotiation in

which Mariette had failed, and for which you said a woman was inadequate?"

The Baroness's eyes sparkled under their treacherous lids :

"Oh! don't talk to me of it," cried she, "I am perfectly miserable. Only conceive that Madame de Brévannes has invented some *coiffure* for the Princesse de Ligne's ball next week, which she thinks is to make a revolution, and of which I cannot obtain the secret."

"But surely, from herself?" objected Sir Edward.

"Herself!" cried the Baroness. "What! did you not know that Irène and I are now at daggers drawn? She has gone over to the enemy, arms and baggage (if she carries all that composes her so-called beauty, the latter would require a waggon to transport it). She is *reclaimed*—that is the word—by that hateful Montévreux set! Well," resumed the *lionne*, "joy go with her! she is no loss to *us*; for, notwithstanding all my efforts, there was

no making anything of her; no giving her any real style, any *chic !*"

"And this head-dress," pursued Sir Edward, "is indispensable to your peace?"

"Perfectly so," replied Madame de Cévèzes; "I went to Constantin's myself; I have sent Mariette there. But the monster, as you heard, resists. Oh! if I had but the secret of that *coiffure*, I would annihilate that ridiculous Irène, by appearing at the Belgian Embassy before her, like a vision of herself in a glass, vanquishing her with her own arms."

"But surely some means could be found," suggested Vernon.

"There is but one," answered the Baronne; "but I think that is certain."

"Name it."

"It is for a man, a gentleman, to go to Constantin's, under pretence of selecting some flowers; and to induce one of the *demoiselles de comptoir* into betraying the secret."

"Suppose," objected Sir Edward, "that he happened not to hit upon the exact one to

whom the confection of the *coiffure* has been entrusted?"

"Then," replied Aurélie, "the same means which would induce the possessor of the secret to betray it, would prevail upon her companion to give up the latter's name."

"And suppose she resisted?" demanded Sir Edward hesitatingly.

"Suppose," echoed Aurélie with contempt; "recollect the story of a certain Queen, who began by saying there *were* people whom nothing could bribe; put that in practice, and it will go hard but your *fleuriste* will also end by saying, '*Vous m'en direz tant!*'"

"*I* will say then," replied he, "in the very words of a French Minister to that very Queen: 'If possible, 'tis already done; if impossible, it shall be so.'"

The *lionne* smiled—a smile to which the anticipation of triumph lent tenderness; and Sir Edward took his leave, tranquillized, flattered, and happy.

That evening Madame de Cévèzes received

a little note, on which was written in a hurried, but well-known hand:

"A wreath of crimson daisies, with a daisy in diamonds for every daisy in flowers; the diamonds are on an entirely new pattern, only to be had at Fossin's, and not *out* yet. The exact number required is deposited at Nattier's, where they will undertake to mount the *guirlande* the instant they know the exact size; they have the precise design."

This expedition had cost Sir Edward Vernon one hundred pounds, for the mere price of the secret; besides four hundred more to ensure the admission of the faulty fair one (certain of her dismissal from Constantin's) into the establishment of another renowned florist. To these sums was likewise to be added Fossin's bill for the diamond daisies; a trifle, to which the favoured admirers of such *lionnes* as Madame de Cévèzes could not be imagined even to advert; and, altogether, it might be considered as rather a dear morning's work.

CHAPTER XIV.

The long dreamed-of ball at the Belgian Embassy had come,—a fairy scene it was,—had passed, and was forgotten, although for many a day did Irène de Brévannes mourn over the wreath of crimson and diamond daisies, purchased at an extravagant cost, and totally eclipsed by its double on the sylph-like head of Madame de Cévèzes.

The steeple-chase had been postponed for ten days, and the period had now come when all Paris took the road to the heights of Berny. Lord Avondale had, as Colonel Mowbray said, placed at Aurélie's entire disposal a covered stand about which all the world was raving, and

into which the fair *lionne's* invitations were alone to admit a privileged few. She had, with her usual disregard of every *convenance*, and of every proper feeling, offered a place to Sir Edward Vernon, which he had as naturally refused; and she had then confined herself to a selection of what are termed indifferent acquaintances, (*anglicè*, people about whom, if they were hanged to-morrow, you would not care a straw.)

The Baroness's first intention was to have gone to the Croix-de-Berny on horseback; but the desire to show to all the world at once the splendours of a new equipage, got the better of this fancy, and Madame de Cévèzes was perceived, accompanied by Madame Ferrières, in what all the connoisseurs acknowledged to be an irreproachable "turn-out." The *calèche*, a dark brown one, was of an exquisitely elegant shape, and the four greys that drew it were beyond all regular price, and belonged to that category of extravagancies worth any money that a madman may be rich enough to pay for

them. The coachman on the box was evidently a first-rate *artiste;* as jolly-faced and sleek, under his well-powdered wig, as the *Suisse* of the Princesse Bagration, and as pompous and important a state-whip as Turnham himself in his best days. Aurélie's carriage was escorted by some dozen dandies of the first water, who were proud of being seen in her train, and gloried in the right they held from her of forming her party in the Avondale stand.

This brilliant little folly was, in truth, a prodigy of magnificence and good taste. Hung all round with draperies of ruby-tinted velvet, six arm-chairs of the same colour were ranged in front to admit six ladies abreast, whilst the gently, inclined plane at the back was made to receive benches for the accommodation of about twenty of the male portion of the creation. The rest of the space was filled up with a miniature forest of the rarest flowering shrubs, between the branches of which you discovered the mirrors which decorated the sides of the slender walls.

Behind the part of the stand exposed to public view was a beautifully-arranged *salle-à-manger*, where, upon the well laid-out table, was to be served, at the hour appointed by the Baroness, a hot collation, for which special purpose Chévet had despatched a squadron of his best cooks. Countless lacqueys, in the gorgeous liveries of Avondale, were loitering around, ready to fly at the slightest signal from a small golden bell placed close to Aurélie's chair.

The Baroness had had the precaution to invite only three ladies, making with herself four, to fill the place of six, and, about an hour before the running was to begin, the triumphant *lionne* appeared upon her throne, to the secret envy of not a few of the most incontestibly well-conducted women in France.

The monster race, for which something like forty or fifty horses were inscribed, and for which it was supposed not less than eighteen or twenty would run, was to be followed by one that excited perhaps even still stronger indi-

vidual interests and international jealousies; a steeple-chase of gentlemen riders, wherein, out of six, three were English, and the other three famous French votaries of the turf, and of what our neighbours now term *le sport*. Needless to say that Lord Avondale was the champion on whom our countrymen principally relied for keeping up the honour of their name.

"Egad, Vernon!" ejaculated Colonel Mowbray, as he came up with Sir Edward on the ground, "you and I seem to me in a deuced bad plight. I wish to Heavens I had betted against you! Not only do I think that I should have been surer of my money on t'other side, but I should have come in for some of Avondale's loaves and fishes, instead of being turned out of the culinary paradise as I am now with you. Only look at Adrien de Fontrailles—"

"D— Adrien de Fontrailles!" exclaimed Sir Edward.

"With all my heart, amen!" responded the Colonel. "But that wouldn't prevent all those who remain in yonder pavilion from devouring a

déjeúner that, I assure you dispassionately, is fit food for the Gods. I was talking just now to Chevet's head man, and he told me of one or two things that have quite sufficed to make me wish both you and my cursedly foolish bet at the devil."

"Why did you make it?" asked Sir Edward good-humouredly.

"Because," rejoined his friend, "I was fool enough to yield to that confoundedly absurd '*first impulse*,' which old Talleyrand truly said was almost always a good one, and which drove me to stand up for a friend. But hallo! I say, Vernon, look over there to the right. See if that isn't my ex-enslaver, Madame de Tresmes, coming up with a friend of yours, too, Lady Tilbury!"

"True, by Jove!" cried Sir Edward. "But what *can* Lady Tilbury be doing in such company?"

"Why, don't you see?" retorted the Colonel. "The Stock Exchange is at the bottom of all things now-a-days. The Bourse, my dear fellow! of which temple Lady Tilbury is one of the priestesses, makes it necessary that she should sacrifice on the altar of Nathan Cronstadt, to whose good graces, at this moment, no better road than Madame de Tresmes."

From the stand constructed by Avondale for Madame de Cévèzes, you had a clear view of the starting point, and were immediately above the winning-post at the bottom of the little declivity. The meanderings of the *Bièvre* were visible at every part where the river formed one of the obstacles to be cleared, and not an accident, should any happen, could well be concealed from the well-placed spectators on the height.

The collation had been served, and amply partaken of by the Baroness's party—Lord Avondale, attired in his jockey's costume, which he knew became him admirably, had paid his respects to the *lionne*, and returned to his post. The great race, the handicap, for which sixteen horses had run, was over, leaving Sir Edward Vernon several thousands out of pocket, and the steeple-chase of gentlemen riders was about to commence.

Now, behind a small group of low trees in the plain, is perceived a confused movement of men, horses, and colours. Now, the signal is heard; and now they are off! Ladies mount on coach-boxes, gentlemen on benches and carts, little boys on trees, and the rabble on any thing they can find. Heads are stretched forward, bonnets impede your view, *lorgnettes* are greedily asked for, and grudgingly passed from hand to hand. There they go!—On the top of yonder hillock appears first the head and neck of a bay horse—'tis Fiamma.

"Bravo, Fiamma!"

"Bravo, Avondale!"

"*Au diable les Anglais!*"

"There comes Hector de Laon."

"*En avant*, Rosine!" And now follows young Granier on his famous mare, Corinne! By Jove! he gets a-head!—No! Captain Hampden passes him. Over comes Taglioni, first over the first hedge! But, at the second, the whole six are together; and at the third too!—And now for the river!

Over they go! No! only four of them!—Two are left behind. There comes one! and there the other! By George! that last is Avondale! he's hurt;—and whipping, spurring, easing, pushing, up come the party-coloured equestrians to the last obstacle,—a wall of loose stones,—close under the brow of the hill whereon watched the attentive crowd. Over come two abreast,—Taglioni and Corinne! Captain Hampden has it!

But the others are on his heels, and at the winning-post the whole are almost in a line; But where is the sixth? There are but five.—"Six came up to the wall, that I'll swear! but one is left behind."

"Who is it? It can't be Avondale;—the thing's impossible!"

"It *is* he though!"

"I tell you it is the man in yellow and lilac."

"That can't be, for there he stands."

"It was the man in grey and red, and that *was* Avondale!"

"Well! he's dished, anyhow," said, in English, a man dressed like a stable-helper, and who, with the shambling gait peculiar to his class, lounged past the pavilion where Aurélie sat enthroned.

"What's it all over with him, Jack?" asked another fellow close by.

"No! not quite exactly that, only he's got more than he likes," was the answer.

"Then, I should imagine, *chère Baronne*, there's nothing more to see," remarked unconcernedly Madame Jacques Vavain.

"Unless, indeed, you wished a visit from our *propriétaire*," retorted Aurélie with a smile.

"That is my very reason for wishing to go

away," answered her friend, "for I suppose they will be bringing him here!"

As Aurélie was proceeding towards her carriage, in the midst of half the lions in Paris, she caught a glimpse of Sir Edward Vernon, to whom she made a gracious sign.

"You will come back with me," said she, as he dismounted from his horse; and, without enquiry for the injured man, in the face of his domestics, and scarcely emerging from the splendours he had lavished upon her, she nestled into a corner of the *calèche*, with her official adorer opposite to her, and the wind, as it encountered her, bore back to the assembled crowd the echoes of her strident, heartless laugh.

As Aurélie sprang into her carriage, a gipsy woman—a true *Bohémienne*—to whom she had some hours previously refused the permission to tell her fortune, ran against her and splashed her dress.

"Can't you look before you?" cried the Baroness, angrily; "you have covered my gown with mud!"

"Never heed that, *ma belle dame*," muttered the crone in a sinister voice. "There is mud now upon your robe, but before the year is out, there will be blood!"

CHAPTER XV

THE spring, the summer, the autumn passed, and still the infatuation lasted; still Sir Edward Vernon felt that Aurélie held him in chains he could not break. Lord Avondale's accident, which was a serious one, had caused him to be sent to some distant German bath to recover, and he was no longer an object of dread. Of Chavigny, Sir Edward had altogether ceased to be jealous, that is, he did not avow to himself openly that the slightest feeling of the kind lingered yet about his heart, although there lay, decidedly, at the very bottom of it, a smouldering, hidden and perfectly covered fire, that needed but a single spark to blaze forth into

a flame. People who love, may be jealous without a cause; but it is rare that, the cause existing, there is not within them a still voice, that, at a given moment, makes itself heard, and hisses in their ears—the truth.

Chavigny, however, led so seemingly retired a life; he so seldom frequented the crowded haunts of the world, his extravagancies were so unostentatious, and his utter contempt for women so utterly undisguised, that no occasion was afforded for supposing him to be ostensibly more occupied about Madame de Cévèzes than about any one else. Besides, Sir Edward, like all weak natures, was considerably tranquillized by the reflection, that no one else had ever dreamt of Aurélie's being admired by Chavigny, or had ever expected that in that quarter could exist any cause for uneasiness to him.

Thus reassured, Vernon continued to flatter himself, and let others flatter him into the belief that the *lionne* of *lionnes* had really allowed herself to be tamed, and that he was the fortunate Van Amburgh. For this conviction, no price seemed

to him too dear, and accordingly, he paid it with every treasure he possessed: health, wealth, consideration, and peace of mind. In the society frequented by Sir Edward, a constitution of bronze was an indispensable requisite; he had it not, and the constant habit of turning night into day, and of what is called "living too fast" in every sense, soon impaired his state of health, not only in reality, but visibly.

He was not lucky; nine times out of ten, chance was against him wherever chance decides; and constant losses, unaccompanied by any corresponding economy to counterbalance them, were not productive of emotions likely to restore serenity to his mind, or strength to his nervous system. Respectability was gone; and, say what an Englishman will, he has, in his inmost soul, a love for it, a want of it, that forces him to mourn bitterly over its loss.

Sir Edward, when he found the people whom in his heart he *did* honour, turning coldly from him, and ceasing to regard him as one of them, was hurt more than any Frenchman could

believe, and returned to that world which he was now *forced* to adopt as his own, with a degree of disappointment and disgust, he was too proud and too deeply wounded to show. By the side of Aurélie, nevertheless, he did forget everything else; in the idea of her affection he deluded himself into a belief that he could be happy; and, eternally reprehensible as it was, guilty and degraded as it had made him, *that* feeling was at least sincere.

The state of his fortune might well have caused greater disquietude to Sir Edward even than it did. Ruin seemed the inevitable consequence of the life he was leading, and yet he appeared to have but one anxiety: to disguise the existence of that fact from the Baroness. Wherefore? Because an instinctive feeling told him he was not sure of her!

And these are the *liaisons*, the *soi-disant* loves of the world! And it is for this, Sir Edward Vernon, that you have turned from your modest wife, and consented to be thrown off by those you respected most; for this, that

you have overstepped all the boundaries of decorum, set at nought all the honest, upright, self-denying principles which ought to regulate and *control* the sentiments of a gentleman, and snapped all those sweet, salutary bonds which linked you to the well-bred and well-minded of your fellow beings, and which you *must* call "cant" and "prejudice," or stand condemned?

Before leaving Paris in July, to follow Aurélie to the Pyrenees for the summer months, Sir Edward had taken measures, with his man of business in London, to ensure the sale of his ancestral home, Vernon Place. Unluckily, the thing was in his power, and before he returned again to Paris, the means of paying his enormous debts, and beginning the world afresh, were furnished him by the alienation of his hereditary property.

Little benefited by experience, he recommenced as heretofore, and few things in Paris were more talked of than the supposed unlimited fortune of Aurélie's lover. Colonel Mowbray

and a few of his countrymen alone, threw out occasional hints that no fortune could last at this rate, and that Vernon would find himself caught; but these were set down as the remarks of envious men, and Sir Edward continued driving along on the high road to uncertain popularity and certain distress.

The winter had set in with deep snow in December, and the *élégantes* began to think that, to be so enveloped in furs and wrappings, so hidden from the public gaze, it was hardly worth while to have left their country-houses and châteaux. But whilst every one was grumbling, the Carnival commenced, and people, somehow or other, began to dance. The Opera, too, had barely waited for winter's first month to be one little week old, ere it had opened its wide doors, and announced its first *bal masqué*.

A masked ball, proper or improper, avowable or not, was the dear delight of Madame de Cévèzes; and, at more than one place one might scarcely dare mention, attired in more

than one dress you might hardly confess to having observed, you might have your arm taken by this *Déjazet* of private life, and a flood of impertinence poured into your ear, in terms that would not have ill-suited her histrionic prototype. The *foyer* of the *Académie Royale de Musique* is, indeed, a place where, well escorted, and in suitable disguise, the most respectable woman may venture; but Aurélie was neither content with the *foyer*, nor with the great building in the Rue Lepelletier. At the Opera-house she plunged into the eccentricities of the ball-room, of the *salle* itself; and was not unfrequently to be seen even in much less decent places. Valentino and Musard were familiar to her; the *masques* of the *Opéra Comique* and the *Variétés* had nothing which alarmed her; and people did go so far as to say they had positively discovered her at the *Descente de la Courtille.* Be this as it may, Aurélie certainly was a distinguished and constant votary of the *bals masqués;* and ill-natured and insolent at all times, under the mask her bitter,

cynical, unfeminine, and ill-governed spirit attained to a perfectly fearful development.

Between twelve and one o'clock on the night of the first masked ball, given at the Grand Opéra, Sir Edward Vernon entered the *foyer* with a domino on his arm. The crowd was not great, for in Paris the crowd seldom goes to the *first* of anything, and waits to have the fact well established of the thing, whatever it may be, being worth going to. And yet, for this night a great "*attraction*" was held forth. It was whispered by the initiated, that Queen Pomaré, Celeste Mogador, and, in short, all the disorderly *troupe* who lend such lustre to the summer *fêtes* of Mabille, meant to join the dances of the *Salle de l'Opéra.* Sir Edward and his companion did not stay long in the *foyer*, but leaving the sable, serious, portion of the community to the vain charms of curiosity and intrigue, they wended their way towards the more riotous joys of the ball.

A stranger spectacle can scarcely be conceived than that of the *Salle de l'Opéra* on these

occasions. It gives the impression of a vast boiler, in which human beings ferment, hiss, bubble, and seethe, like heated liquor overflowing the rim of the giant vat with noisy foam, and sending up with the mingled breath of a thousand mouths, a curling, foggy cloud of mounting vapour.

In the midst of the din, the rythm of the orchestra pierces triumphantly; the trumpets and brass instruments tear through the tumult as the flash from a cannon rends the densest smoke. The lights of the lamps and chandeliers grow blood-red and dusky as the street illuminations for a public *fête;* the various costumes glimmer and dazzle in perpetual movement, like the countless morsels of a kaleidescope that should be for ever revolving; every eye sparkles, every arm gesticulates, every lip utters unknown sounds, every foot adds its individual mite of noise, to this mass of confusion, splendour, wit, enjoyment, vice, and riot.

As Sir Edward and his domino descended the small flight of steps that lead from the

corridor behind the first tier of boxes into the pit, he felt his companion make a momentary halt.

"Is Pomaré really here?" said she.

"Yes, with all the band," was the reply.

"Whom did you speak to?" asked Vernon.

"To Adrien de Fontrailles," rejoined Aurélie.

They descended the remainder of the stairs, but Sir Edward, as he involuntarily turned his head to see the person designated by his companion, instead of M. de Fontrailles, caught only a glimpse of the tired and supercilious face of Chavigny, as he turned listlessly, and with drawling step into the *foyer*.

The dancing had begun, and all the world was watching a group formed towards the upper end of the *salle*. There was Pomaré, in person, with her eyebrows black as night, and her luxuriant hair, capable of matching in quantity and curl with that of Madame de Samoiloff (before she cut it off); and there also Céleste, later surnamed Mogador, and destined to equestrian celebrity; tall, well-made, and with more

repose than Queen Pomaré, Céleste recalls a little the aristocratical *canaillerie* of Esther—the famous Esther of the *Variétés*, the legitimate daughter of the strange Marquis de Bongars.

On the other side, is Frisette, in a jockey's dress; brown, lithe, snake-like, and looking, with her wavy hair, something between a half-cast and a *créole*. Rigolette (called, like many of her companions, after the creation of a popular writer) is perfectly electrical, and literally seems to throw forth sparks of fire; Queen Bacchanal, fair, and amply proportioned, seems a nymph fresh from the rich and carnal pencil of Rubens; there is Rose Pompon, the attendant and maid of honour of Queen Pomaré, bright and youthful as her name bespeaks; there the three *Fanchons*—Louise, Maria, and lastly, Rita, whose brilliant teeth condemn her to eternal smile. Further on, are the satellites of these universally renowned stars: Hermance, La Louve, Panache, and others, who are more or less famous for their beauty, wit, or dexterity in dancing the *cancan*.

After a quarter of an hour spent in criticising these celebrities, the Baroness expressed a wish to regain the *foyer*, and neither the graces of the fair *danseuses* we have mentioned, nor the drolleries of their partners, no less famous, could retain her. She had no laugh ready to be wasted on Pritchard, who is like nothing but a corpse that should have gone mad; nor on Tortillard, who performs more wonderful feats than a dozen clowns put together; nor on Brididi, who, with the agility of Auréol, disdains every other dress save that of an Ojibbeway or Ioway Indian.

To the *foyer*, then, they went; and when there: "Leave me now, *mon cher enfant*," said Aurélie to Vernon. "I have business on hand, and must go and torment that stupid old fool, M. de Renneville, whom I see there to the right, about something I heard last night."

Off she darted, leaving Sir Edward alone, to wait till it should please her to claim his escort home. He sauntered up and down for another half-hour; got, first, tired of not being *intrigué*,

and next, tired of being so too much; and then, leaving the rendezvous of intrigue, he went, and took his seat on one of the buffets on either side of the entrance to the *foyer*, the habitual lounging-post of most of the members of the Jockey Club, and of the more noted *lions* of the day.

"By all the saints in Mabille's calendar!" exclaimed Lord Bournemouth, advancing lazily towards the group assembled, about three o'clock, round the left hand buffet; "there is, at this moment, a *débardeuse* in full swing down yonder, who out-does all I ever saw of the kind, and I've seen a good deal in my time."

"Who is it?" "Who can it be?" "What is she like?" "Who can tell?" burst from all the hearers at once.

"As to *who* she is," replied the informant, "one thing is certain,—she's nothing respectable, for she knew me at once, and called out to me by my name. As to what she's like,—you had best go and see, for, as I tell you, she's like nothing any of you ever saw. *Enfonceés*,

Pomaré, Céleste, and Rose Pompon! They're all unfit to raise their heads above her ancle. *Sacristie! quelle verve! quelle souplesse! quel chic!*"

Before he could say more, the whole troop of his listeners were on their road to the *salle*, taking with them Sir Edward Vernon. When they had penetrated into the thick of the ball, several of them marked the peculiar expression with which Lionel Chavigny was looking at some dance that was going on. He was standing right opposite to the very *débardeuse* of whom Lord Bournemouth had spoken, and, as he gazed, a strange interest, a kind of sullen pleasure, seemed unwillingly to expand over his impassible features and unsympathetic face.

Vernon marked him also, but he had hardly time to examine the object of his scrutiny; he had but just obtained a view of a blue satin jacket, and a pair of white satin trowsers, *galonnés* with black velvet and pearl buttons, before his own long-absent domino plucked at his sleeve. He prepared to follow, but turned

round again to look at the white satin trowsers, which rather displeased him, and in which he thought he vaguely recognised an old acquaintance. But the domino was impatient, and, he was quite aware, must be obeyed; so he followed the black lace lappets he knew so well—for the domino did not take his arm, but made for herself a path through the crowd before him. He followed and followed still; and, just at the top of the stairs, he had rejoined the domino, and was about now to offer his arm.

"Well, Vernon," exclaimed Lord Bournemouth, who was still there, "ready for supper?"

Sir Edward pointed to his charge, who was waiting for him.

"Well, good bye, then," rejoined his friend. "I'm a regular man, and find these hours of yours too much for my delicate health. Mowbray and I are going to take something in the shape of a devil, or a broiled bone, at Broggi's, close by. If you like to come—come! You won't get such another devil, I can tell you, out of London," pursued the speaker, turning round,

as he prepared to depart; "for it's a flunkie of my own who prepares it."

Before Sir Edward could reply, a rush of people coming from the *salle* had nearly carried him off his legs. Where now was his domino? Gone! He bustled through the crowd as well as he was able—up and down the corridor—from side to side of the *foyer*, and then again back into the *salle*. But there was no appearance of the domino with the lappets of black lace; none, either, of the *débardeuse* with the trowsers of white satin and the bands of black velvet on the seams. And Chavigny was sitting in the red stage-box* alone, calmly looking down on the gradually thinning space below.

Sir Edward retraced his steps. In the *foyer* the clock marked four. He was just beginning to despair, when the little domino with the black lace lappets made its way through some stragglers, and took his arm.

* A few years back the proscenium boxes at the *Académie Royale* were designated familiarly by their colours: "*la loge bleue*," was the box tenanted by M. V—— and his *clique*. "*La loge rouge*," belonged to the Jockey Club.

"At last!" exclaimed Vernon. "I really thought you were lost!"

"St—st!" said the domino, putting its little gloved finger to its lips; and Sir Edward was dragged away too rapidly to admit of much talking. As they turned down one flight of steps towards the *sortie*, he thought he perceived (but what did that matter to him?) Chavigny saunteringly descending the other, with the mysterious *débardeuse* on his arm. He certainly *did* catch a sight of a pair of white satin trowsers; but on he went, he and his imperious little domino, whom he was so glad to have securely clinging to his arm.

But sometimes old adages are right; and, "most haste worse speed" is one that perhaps the most frequently proves true. On the few latter steps of the great stairs, the domino's haste was such, that both Sir Edward and his charge got again fairly caught in the crowd. They could not move; and still the obstinate little domino would push on.

Several times had Sir Edward whispered, "Be

quiet, dearest child!"—"Do not hurry and press on so!" with a thousand other counsels, to which the domino ever answered, "*St*— *!*" and continued to push onward still more. Another step now, and they would be down, and could easily run to the carriage; but as her tiny foot was touching that one, last, step, the button of a fat old gentleman behind caught the black lace lappets, and forcibly pulled back the *capuchon*, and bared the little domino's head.

What has Vernon seen? Hair jetty as a raven's wing!

To start, and without an instant's reflection, to snatch violently the mask from the impostor's face, was the work of a second, and Sir Edward stood face to face with Mademoiselle Florinde, one of the illustrations of the corps de ballet.

"Confusion!" cried he, as a frightful thought crossed his mind; and the crowd instinctively gave way before the infuriated being, who sprang wildly up the stairs he had just descended, with the mask he had torn from

Florinde's face still in his hand, as though there were some damning evidence in that.

He dashed up one stair-case and down the other, pierced the crowd at the opposite side of the vestibule, and gained the outer hall just in time to see Lionel Chavigny hand into a dark brown *coupé* a *débardeuse* in white satin trowsers, with black velvet bands on the seams.

When he reached the street, the carriage had disappeared, but whether it had turned to right or left, towards the Boulevards or the other way, was more than he could tell, or than any one could tell him.

CHAPTER XVI.

Sir Edward lost not a moment in flying to Chavigny's house. The Rue Taitbout was wrapped in silence; not a creature, save himself, moved along the snow-covered pavement; not a carriage disturbed the stillness of the street. From the village-like tranquillity that reigned around—from the aspect of the high houses, their closed shutters, or inwardly-curtained windows, seen by the light of the pale, flickering gas-lamps—you would not guess that, so near, Pandemonium itself was let loose; for the echoes of the din reached your ear faintly and in dim and distant murmurs. Vernon paced up and down upon the *trottoir*, waiting for the car-

riage he had seen to arrive; but no such equipage came, and more than half an hour elapsed.

Could they, notwithstanding the stoppages in the streets surrounding the Opera-House, have so completely distanced him as to have already gained Chavigny's door? He looked at the wheel-marks on the snow, which had only ceased to fall during the last hour. No carriage had either drawn up to the door of the hotel, or turned through the *porte-cochère* into the court. Could they have left the carriage, which was probably a job one, and, not choosing to be traced, taken the precaution of going on foot? Sir Edward adopted the latter conclusion, and, acting on it, rang violently at the bell. Too violently—he felt that; and, on the porter's non-appearance, he repeated his summons more gently. The astonished *concièrge* opened the door himself, and was inclined to be alarmed on beholding a stranger. Sir Edward, however, not only re-assured him by his voice and manner, which he contrived to control in perfection,

but by another argument, the direct reverse of what burglars habitually employ.

Upon his enquiring for M. Chavigny, the *concièrge* assured him his master had not yet returned; but, softened by Sir Edward's way of showing his affability, he gave him the clue necessary for obtaining admittance at the earliest possible hour in the day-time.

"If you will call to-morrow morning at twelve *precisely*, Sir," said the mollified Cerberus, "I think I can answer for your seeing Monsieur; for I happen to know from his own *valet-de-chambre*, that he is to be called at nine o'clock. He has important business to transact at home, and will not go out before two. As to the hour of his return here, now, it is monstrous uncertain; for—an extraordinary circumstance—M. Baptiste has been expressly told not to sit up for his master."

Forced to be satisfied with this intelligence, and feeling it would be worse than useless to attempt any enquiries at the Baroness's abode,

Sir Edward, after watching silently in the Rue Taitbout till his teeth chattered audibly with the cold, threw himself into the first cab he could find on the Boulevard, and wended his weary way to his own wretched home.

Meanwhile, where were the fugitives? Into the largest and best-furnished *cabinet particulier* of the *Café Anglais*, a couple entered towards half-past four o'clock. A bright fire was blazing, and reflecting its rays in the burnished silver and brilliant crystals of a table prepared for supper. When the door closed, the cloak which had closely enveloped the lesser of the two nightly revellers, was thrown aside, and a *débardeuse* in full costume flung herself into a chair, and, untying her mask, literally writhed with laughter. Her companion, looking alternately at the fire and at her, with a singular and inexplicable expression of countenance, merely allowed a smile to hover over his lips, without settling there. That smile was an unpleasant one; it was, as might be said, the ghost of a smile dead long years ago.

"But what will have become of your friend, Florinde?" asked the *débardeuse*, as soon as she could speak.

"Oh! don't fear for her!" answered he; "she was sure of her affair the moment her mask was off. The struggle will have been for who should replace her lost swain."

"What a fury!" cried the lady. "I shan't forget him in a hurry! Seen from a distance, it was really quite effective, and decidedly better than anything they do on the stage. And yet, who would have thought it? With that fair face and those soft blue eyes. An Englishman, too! and such a gentle voice!"

"Never judge from appearances, Baronne," replied Chavigny, with a strange air. "Look at me; I don't appear what the world calls exactly joyous; (and the irony of his cold smile was at this moment perfectly appalling) yet I doubt whether, if you were to unite in one, all the jolliest dogs of this town, the explosion of their mirth would drown the Homeric laugh that at this moment is violently convulsing my very vitals."

"And still," replied the Baroness, with an involuntary inward shudder, "you do not look gay! And pray, what causes your mirth?"

"Everything! From the sovereigns of the earth down to the dustmen: statesmen and the science of government; ambition and the ambitious; lovers and love; the wealthy and their gold; women; men; you!—(the Baroness started)—but most of all, myself!"

"Gold, I can understand," said Aurélie; "you are so rich!"

"Humph!" murmured Lionel; "I shall be richer to-morrow."

"What an eternal speculator you are—"

"Yes! but," interrupted he, "my speculation of to-morrow is a sure one, and does not depend on any chance. But, go on."

"Well, then," resumed the Baroness, "I can understand your contempt for gold; you are rich. But the rest?—Love—women?"

"Have I been poor there?" rejoined he, with an expression that spoke more of disgust than *fatuité*.

"But then," exclaimed she impatiently,

"what *has* been the use of your fortune?—What have you lived for?"

"Don't get into a passion," replied Chavigny, calmly; "not because it does not become you, (for it does!) but because it renders your voice still harsher than it naturally is. My riches have bought me experience, and I have lived . . . ."

"To enjoy," said Madame de Cévèzes, filling up the sentence.

"No; to discover—to *know*. . . ."

"To know *what?*" rejoined Aurélie.

"Many things that you, too, will know one day," he replied, "for you really have a superior intelligence—a good head," added he, looking steadily at her, "and totally unembarrassed by any heart."

Madame de Cévèzes smiled, as though she had received a compliment. "Tell me," she cried abruptly, "did you ever— "

The door opened, and a legion of waiters entered, bearing the accessaries for supper. Chavigny rose.

"Do not let the green oysters get hot, or the

potage à la bisque cold," said he, leading his companion ceremoniously by the hand towards the table. "*Garçon!* what wine is that in the cooler?"

"*Sillery mousseux*, sir," replied the attentive domestic.

"Moët?"

"*Oui, Monsieur.*"

"Replace it by *Sillery sec!*"

The *garçon* flew like lightning.

"I hate your frothy wines," observed Lionel, slowly letting a fat green oyster glide through his lips and down his throat.

"You are perfectly correct, *mon cher*," rejoined Aurélie, "the *mousse* is a mere *distraction* to the taste, and takes off from what I would call the sense, the serious intention of the wine."

"I judged you rightly, I find," rejoined Chavigny. "I thought you a woman capable of understanding these things and despising all that was unreal; it is a height to which the women who attain are incalculably few."

"It is a point of education in which I never could bring that fool, Vernon, to anything satisfactory;" remarked Madame de Cévèzes. "He never got beyond the very imperfect knowledge of certain elementary principles, certain broad staring colours; I never could bring him to have any delicacy of discrimination, any fine sentiment of the *nuances*, of the half-tints. I never shall forget one day that he dined with me at Enghien: we were but four,—*La vieille* Ferrières, Adrien de Fontrailles, Edouard, and myself. Simier had, that day, made a *purée de gibier* which was an idea less exquisite than usual, owing to his having run short of partridges, and being obliged to help out his breasts and wings with back and legs. Now only conceive that, whilst Adrien and I were disputing as to whether there really *were* any other than the more delicate portions of the bird in the sauce, that *imbécile d'Edouard* was complaining in an under tone (I overheard him) to the Ferrières, that it wanted taste! (taste indeed!) and was actually adding salt and pepper (which

latter he had obtained, I know not how!) From that hour I gave it up as a bad job."

Chavigny smiled,—his curious smile!

"How outrageously in love he must have been with you!" said he, musingly. "And yet, Lady Vernon, whom I only saw twice,—once at the races in her carriage, and once at the *Italiens* in her box—was (you are far too superior to the petty weaknesses of your sex, to be offended at what I am going to say) was what is called, and what almost every man would call, a handsomer woman than yourself."

"Handsomer,—oh, yes!" rejoined Madame de Cévèzes, with one of *her* smiles, for she, too, had smiles, in which all the native serpent glittered forth, "but she wanted something in her air which I—which *we*—have."

"And she had, too, something which you will always want," rejoined Lionel, carrying to his mouth his first spoonful of soup.

"And for the having which, her lord and master deserted her," retorted the Baroness.

"Exactly so!"

"And did you really care for him?" added Chavigny, after a pause.

"How could I?" replied she, as though she were saying the most natural thing in the world. "He was my slave!"

"And you would like some one who should be your master?" murmured Lionel.

"Perhaps so."

"That *sole Normande* is not sufficiently *réduite;* try one of the *croutons*, they are better *rissolés*," suggested Chavigny, parenthetically, and then, resuming the theme of his discourse; "the sort of person you take me to be," said he, "is what you fancy might suit you."

"Who told you that?" retorted the Baroness, laughing.

"Told!" echoed he. "Do you think I want telling? But, as to that, it is time lost," he continued. "I shall never be in love with you."

"Never?" replied Aurélie, with a peculiar expression.

"Never!" he rejoined, shaking his head.

"And, then, I know too well all your ways," added he. "There can be nothing new in all that."

"And yet," interposed Madame de Cévèzes, with more pique than she would perhaps have chosen to avow,—"and yet, you were *not* prepared for seeing me as I am to-night."

Her companion bowed assent. The *lionne* continued: "You did *not* look upon me when I was dancing, with indifference."

"You are quite right, I did *not*,—in the first place, I never saw the *cancan* better danced; you give the go-by all to nothing to Pomaré and the rest; because, though as *canaille* as they are, there is a perfume of aristocracy about your impropriety, of which you cannot divest yourself, and which they cannot gain; and next, I saw that my attention captivated you, and I was flattered at the effect I could produce."

"And yet—" murmured the Baroness archly.

"The time is long passed with me," rejoined he, "when vanity was the key to the passions."

"Chavigny," said the *lionne* significantly, and fixing the full glare of her mischievous eye upon her companion, "you *loved* Madame de Boislambert."

A very narrow observer might have detected a slight, an imperceptible shade upon Lionel's countenance, but he returned the Baroness's glance by one as steady.

"The clearness of your perception has not been dulled by the fearfully material life you have led," remarked he. "Well! I cannot but admire the rescue of the intellect, especially in one of your sex, amidst the awful wreck of all the rest."

"The what!" exclaimed Aurélie. "What are you talking of? I positively believe you are preaching."

"I!" cried Lionel, as though waking from a reverie. "Nay, Baronne, pledge me in a glass of Sillery, to the future reign of the *lionnes*, and the utter confusion of all morality! And so, really," pursued he, putting down his glass, "you have never yet loved?"

"Never, that I can remember," answered she, firmly and collectedly.

Lionel rose from his chair, and advancing towards Aurélie, raised her hand to his lips with the devout respect of a courtier for his sovereign.

"That is more than *any man* living can say," remarked he, as he reseated himself. "You *are* our masters, and I have always thought so."

"And pray," asked Madame de Cévèzes with a contemptuous curl of the lip, "if you, of the other sex *do* sacrifice once in your lives to what your canters term 'the all-ruling passion,' what do you get from it? What remains?"

"Nothing, God knows!—Worse than nothing. A black, desolate spot, from whence the last cinder of the fire has been swept, but where the verdure is for ever destroyed; a soil whereon salt has been strewn, and where no flower can henceforward spring up."

The voice in which Chavigny uttered these words was so *real*, so *true*, so unlike his

habitual tone, that the *lionne* absolutely started. Recovering himself instantaneously:

"What are you dreaming of, Baronne?" suddenly exclaimed he. "Champagne after pheasant! you are quite out there: take Burgundy. There, try that Clos-Vougeot—it is excellent! You will see how it harmonizes with, and, as it were, completes the taste of the white game."

The hours flew by, and it was close upon seven o'clock before Madame de Cévèzes had laid her head upon the pillow in the shell-shaped couch we have described. But it was long before she slept; the question of whether any one, woman or man, ever went entirely through life without paying one tribute to the God of the poisoned quiver, kept her from closing her eyes.

* * * *

At twelve o'clock, Sir Edward Vernon presented himself at the door of Chavigny's hotel. The *concièrge* was absent, the *porte-cochère* was open, and a hackney-coach was standing before

it, with its coachman fast asleep on the box. The uninvited and agitated guest was somewhat astonished at the total absence of servants in so well-appointed a house, and at the facilities afforded to his entrance. He went on, crossed the court, entered the vestibule, looked around; still no one came; until at length a little girl, the porter's child perhaps, came running down the stairs, and, pointing upwards, said:

"Up there, Sir; go up there; you'll find them in the first room on the right hand."

Not exactly understanding what it all meant, but determined at all events to have an explanation with the master of the house, Vernon did as he was desired; and on the landing-place turned to the right, entered an ante-room, and, after a moment's hesitation, penetrated into an apartment, the door of which was half open. But here, what an unlooked-for spectacle met his eye!

On a bed hung with dark green damask, and the foot of which, owing to its being made after the Francis I. fashion, was towards the

door, lay stretched a man dressed in black. A young man, on whose countenance sincere grief was depicted, stood gazing on the whole scene, with an open letter in his clasped hands; another letter was lying open on the floor, close beside a female figure, kneeling at the foot of the bed, and whose long, dishevelled, fair locks nearly covered her slight form; a staid middle-aged man was sitting in an arm-chair at the head of the couch; his legs were crossed, and he was beating time on his watch—evidently, he was a physician. An elderly lady, rather too stout, yet still aristocratic-looking, was seated on the opposite side of the bed. Sir Edward's old acquaintance, the *concièrge*, was moving backwards and forwards, doing nothing.

"Ah, Monsieur!" cried he, holding up his hands and eyes, as he recognised the visitant of the previous night, "who would have thought it! Look at him!"

Vernon went up to the bed; the man upon it was Chavigny. And he was dead.

From a deep wound just under the left ear,

the blood was still flowing, and the vital artery was severed. The awful silence of the dim room was only broken by the convulsive sobs of the woman at the foot of the bed, towards whom Sir Edward dared not look.

Vernon drew back with a shudder from the corpse. The sight of the dead body of his worst enemy, sent to his reckoning thus unshriven and unannealed, will scarcely leave any man unmoved.

"I did not know you were a friend of his, Sir Edward," said the young man we have mentioned.

"I was not," replied Vernon, recognising the Duc d'Jéna; "but I had business with him this morning, and—"

"Read that," interrupted the Duke, putting into his hand the letter he held. It ran thus:—

"Dear Emile.—Before I go, I know not whither, I would fain shake hands with you once more. I have nothing to leave. My last illusion vanished many years ago. My last Napoleon has now rejoined it in the abyss of

the things that were. What I spent so freely was the capital itself, and not its produce. All is gone now, and the sale of my house, horses, and the other baubles that made me one of you, will serve to pay the debts I have been unable to count up. Adieu.—I do, in this instance, but what I have been used to do all my life; namely, retire from the *spectacle* before the last act is played."

"He must have known well what he was about," observed the Doctor, when Sir Edward, after perusing this note, had returned it to the owner; "the carotid is cut with extraordinary dexterity—just enough and no more. I could not have operated the section better myself."

"His coolness was always something wonderful," remarked the Duc d'Jéna; "but it has been incredible in this last awful circumstance. Imagine," continued he, turning to Sir Edward, "that his own valet, Baptiste, knew nothing of the matter, till I arrived half an hour ago, bringing *M. le Docteur* with me!"

"How so?" demanded Sir Edward, interested in spite of his other engrossing pre-occupations, in so horrible an occurrence.

"When Baptiste came, as usual, to call his master in the morning, (as he had been told to do, at nine o'clock) he undrew this window-curtain, farthest from the bed-head, which was his habit, leaving the other closed. He perceived that no one had lain upon the bed, and supposed Lionel had not returned home all night. On the table, however, lay two letters, addressed to different persons—one to me—and beside them, on a slip of paper was written in Lionel's own hand: 'To be taken immediately by Baptiste himself.' Accordingly, Baptiste took the letters. I flew to *M. le Docteur* instantaneously, and we lost no time in hastening to where we now are; but on entering this room we discovered nothing. To give us more light, however, that curtain yonder was withdrawn, and behind it we discovered the object of our search."

The Duc d'Jéna stopped, overcome by emotion.

"Yes!" added the Doctor, "he had actually tied himself by the left arm to the *espagnolette* of the window, so that, when we first saw him he was upright, and his head had only fallen against the window; the razor was lying at his feet, and the carpet soaked in blood—you can see now that it is saturated."

Vernon gave an involuntary start of horror.

"Poor Lionel!" added M. d'Jéna, "he died standing; it was very like him."

All this conversation had taken place in so whispered a tone, and the gloom of the chamber was so great, that the lady, seated at the further side of the bed, had not yet discovered who the last comer was. Suddenly, however, she rose, and advanced towards the group, when, recognising Vernon—

"Oh! my dear Sir Edward!" cried she, in what might almost be called accents of joyful anguish, and all but embracing him whom she addressed, "how glad I am it is you! How lucky that you have come! For Heaven's sake, talk reason to that whimpering idiot yonder!

Tell her, what I've been trying to make her understand till I am tired, that, whatever may take place within one's own doors, one does *not* do these things publicly, and before all the world. For a man, too, who was not of our own society, it is deplorable! Do speak to her!"

Sir Edward turned round. It was the Marquise de Vallemer, Aurélie's mother, who spoke. Pale, quivering, writhing under the sudden application of this torture, he cast one withering glance upon Madame de Cévèzes as she knelt, and, bursting from the grasp of the indignant Marquise, he stooped but to snatch the paper that lay on the carpet, close to the Baroness's blood-stained robe, and, with the suppressed groan of an animal wounded by its death-blow, he darted from the room, and, like a madman, from the house.

The letter addressed to Aurélie contained but a few words; they were as follows:

"Madame la Baronne: When I told you last

night that you could wake no love in me, I spoke as a man in whose eyes, so soon to close, all worldly things were vain; but I repeat to you again, for the living, you are the most seducing, the most *dangerous* being I ever saw; and if I were not ruined, the pleasure of breaking you in might be some inducement to live. But, unless I am much mistaken, your superiority is gone. You are very frank, and I *believe* told me the truth last night, when you said you had never loved. But, this time twelvemonths, Madame la Baronne, will you, with equal truth, repeat those words again to whoever shall be fortunate enough to sup with you on the night of the first *Bal masqué?*"

END OF VOL. II.

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